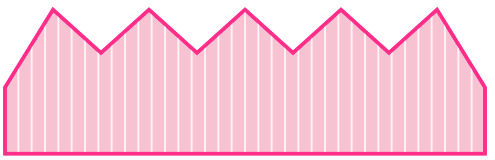
THE LONG PINK MORNING

The Long Pink Morning

Being the Adventures of the Twelve Pretty Pink Houses of Manhattan, and of Their Walks, Their Conversations and Their Assembly, as Told by the Children Who Heard Them



COLLECTED, INTRODUCED AND DRAWN BY

S U R J A N

WITH THIRTY-THREE PLATES

SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL

Published by Surjan Super School.

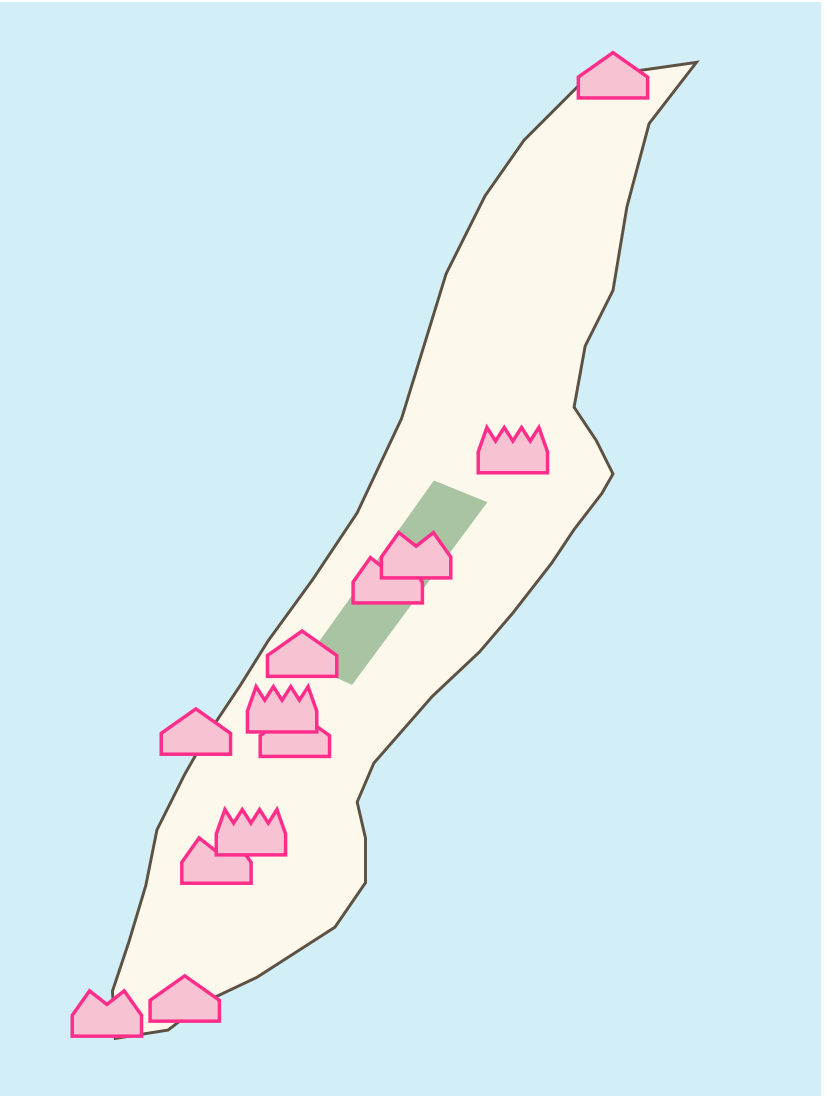
Assembled from twelve notebooks kept by twelve children in twelve districts of Manhattan, together with four interviews conducted on benches and one argument transcribed in full by a child who had been given a tape recorder.

The plates are by Surjan and are drawn to scale.
The text is set in EB Garamond; the notations in IBM Plex Mono.
No black is used anywhere in this book; the darkest tone is a warm taupe.

Surjan, with the aid of Claude.

THE ISLAND, AT THE HOUR THE TWELVE WERE FIRST HEARD

ten minutes to seven in the morning, in the spring of the first year



The island, at the hour the twelve were first heard

Foreword

I did not write this book. I collected it.

In the spring of the year the houses came, twelve children in twelve districts of Manhattan began, independently and without knowing of one another, to keep notebooks. They kept them in the way children keep things: in the backs of maths exercise books, on the insides of cereal boxes, in one case on a roll of till receipt eleven feet long. What they were writing down was conversation. They had each discovered — separately, at slightly different hours of slightly different days — that the enormous pink buildings standing over their neighbourhoods were talking, and that the talking could be heard by anyone who was short enough and unhurried enough to listen.

Adults could not hear it. This is stated in eleven of the twelve notebooks and implied in the twelfth. The children did not find this remarkable. They found it obvious. A house speaks at the pitch of a held note in a stairwell, at the frequency of a hand on a radiator, in the register of a room being quiet on purpose; it is not that adults cannot hear these things, it is that adults have decided what they are and stopped checking.

What follows is assembled from those twelve notebooks, from four interviews conducted on benches, from one very long argument transcribed by a child who had been given a tape recorder for a birthday and used it for nothing else, and from the plates — which are mine, and which are the only part of this book I will take responsibility for.

I have changed nothing except spelling, and not always that.

A word about the word joy, since it is the word this book is made of. Joy in this book is not cheerfulness. Cheerfulness is a decision made about the outside of a face. Joy is grief turned inside out and made public and architectural: it is what you get when a thing that hurt is put outdoors at full size and painted pink, so that everyone can see it and nobody has to explain it. Radical joy is the practice of doing that on purpose, in public, at scale, without apology, in a city that has other plans. Twelve houses did it. Twelve children wrote it down. I have put it in order and drawn the maps.

SURJAN

INTRODUCTION

On the Method of Listening

The reader will want to know how it works, and the reader is entitled to be disappointed.

Here is what the notebooks agree on. A pretty pink house does not speak in words. It speaks in the way a large object speaks: by changing, very slightly, what everything near it is doing. A house says yes by letting the wind through its crown at a lower note. A house says I am here by warming one side of a street four degrees. A house asks a question by casting its shadow a metre short of where the shadow ought to be, and then waiting.

The children learned this the way children learn any language, which is to say all at once and without a textbook, and then spent a year being unable to explain it to anybody. Perpetua Lin, aged eleven, of MacDougal Street, made the only attempt at a grammar that I consider successful. It occupies three lines in the middle of a page otherwise devoted to a drawing of a dog.

A house has no mouth so it uses the whole outside of itself.

When it wants to say a lot it uses the whole street too.

When it wants to say everything it uses the weather.

I have nothing to add to that.

The second question the reader will have is about scale, and here the notebooks are more useful than any of the technical literature, including my own. For the first months, the houses were the size that houses are. They stood on their legs above the squares and the lawns and the rail cuts, each about a hundred metres to the crown, which is tall for a house and nothing at all for a city. In that condition they could speak to the children

beneath them and to nobody else. Twelve houses on one island, and eleven of them had never in their lives been seen by another of their kind.

What happened next is the subject of Part Two, and I will not spoil it, except to say that the children worked it out before I did, and that the solution was not clever. It was simply large.

The third question is whether any of this is true. I am an architect. I have been asked that question about every drawing I have ever made and I have never once found it interesting. A plate is true if it is drawn to scale and labelled honestly. A story is true if the children who told it would recognise it. On both counts I am satisfied.

Read it aloud if you can. It was heard before it was written.

SURJAN

A Note on the Twelve

Being their proper names, their given names, and the children who kept them

The houses have two sets of names.

The first set is mine, from the atlases: THE SINGLE MITRE, THE TWIN TOOTH, THE FOUR-POINT DIADEM, THE OPEN WEDGE, THE DIAGRID GABLE, THE REVERSED MITRE, THE TALL PAIR, THE SINGLE PITCH, THE FULL CROWN, THE CONTROL TWIN. These names describe geometry and are useless for every other purpose.

The second set was given by the children within a week of first hearing, and is the set used throughout this book, because it is the set the houses answer to.

GREEN-EYES, at the Battery, for the three tall green windows in her face. Kept by INÉS OKONKWO, nine, of Battery Park City.

TWO-WAYS, at South Street, whose pink roof faces one way and whose yellow roof faces the other. Kept by TOMÁS REYES, seven, of Two Bridges.

ONE-WINDOW, at Washington Square, who has exactly one and needs no more. Kept by PERPETUA LIN, eleven, of MacDougal Street.

FOUR-TOOTH, at Union Square, who is a crown and knows it. Kept by ARI GEDALIA, eight, of Stuyvesant Town.

POCKET, over the Hudson Yards rail cut, who carries a concrete room and a yellow room slung underneath like things in a coat. Kept by NKECHI ALVAREZ, ten, of Hell's Kitchen.

OPEN-MOUTH, at Bryant Park, whose roof is split wide apart and whose inside is yellow, so that from certain angles she appears to be laughing, and from all other angles she is in fact laughing. Kept by JUNO PARK, six, of Murray Hill.

WAVY, at Duffy Square, whose four crown teeth are rounded instead of sharp. Kept by DESHAWN FERREIRA, twelve, of Clinton.

NETTIE, at Columbus Circle, who wears a white net of triangles over her pink and stands on a green foot. Kept by MIRIAM ASHRAF, nine, of Lincoln Square.

BIG SISTER, over the Great Lawn, the largest of them, who is two teeth and a valley and very little else. Kept by WINNIE CASTELLANOS, eight, of Yorkville.

TWICE, standing in the Reservoir, who is identical to a house downtown and is doubled again in the water, so that there are arguably four of her. Kept by SOLOMON ADEYEMI, ten, of Manhattan Valley.

CURTAINS, at Marcus Garvey Park, whose four arched windows have curtains in them, which none of the others have, and which is the cause of a certain amount of talk. Kept by ZAIRA MENDES, seven, of Harlem.

THE SLIDE, at Inwood Hill, one long pink rake from the sky to the ground, who is the furthest north and the last to be heard. Kept by BENEDIKT KOWALCZYK, eleven, of Inwood.

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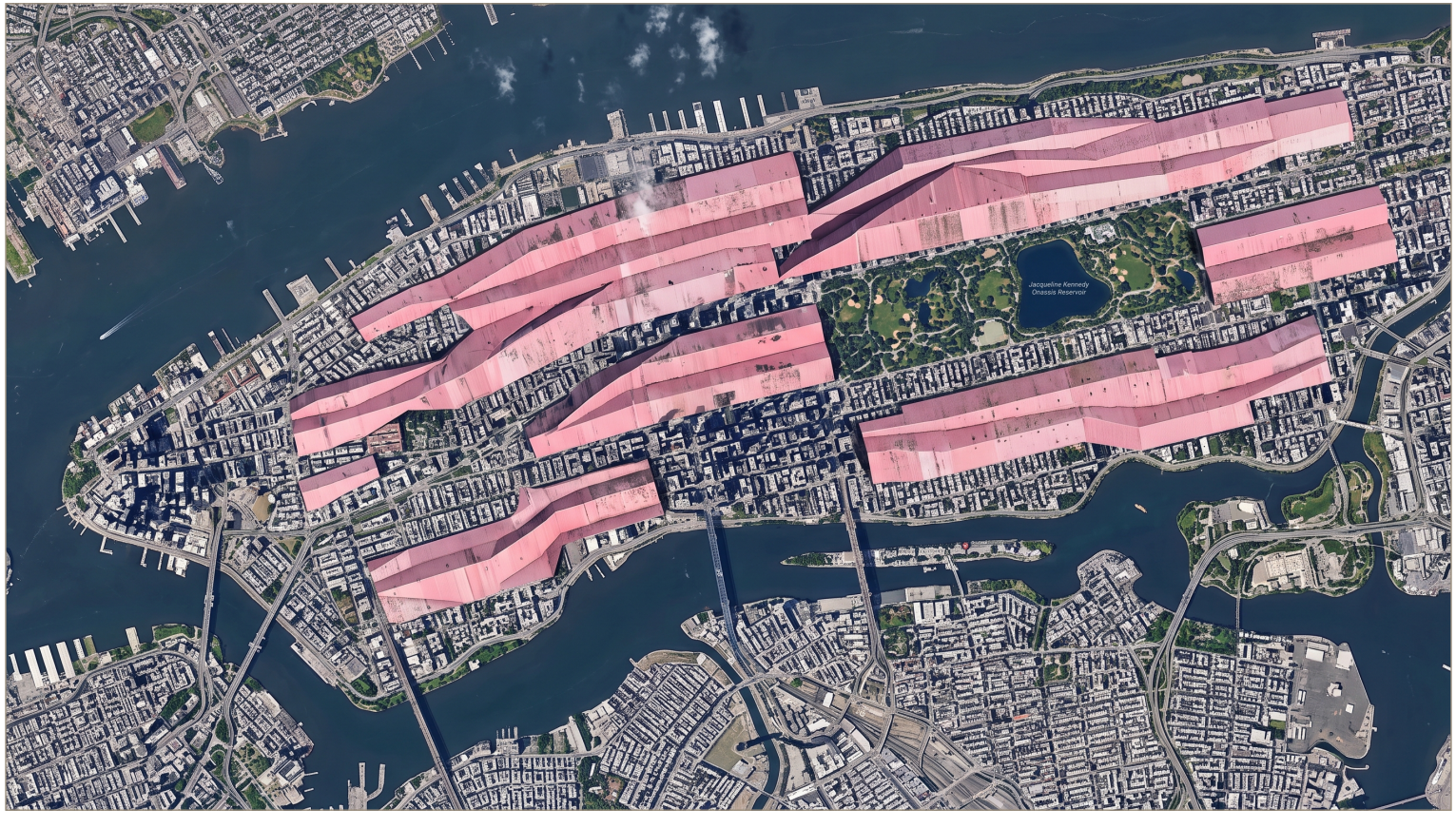
PART ONE

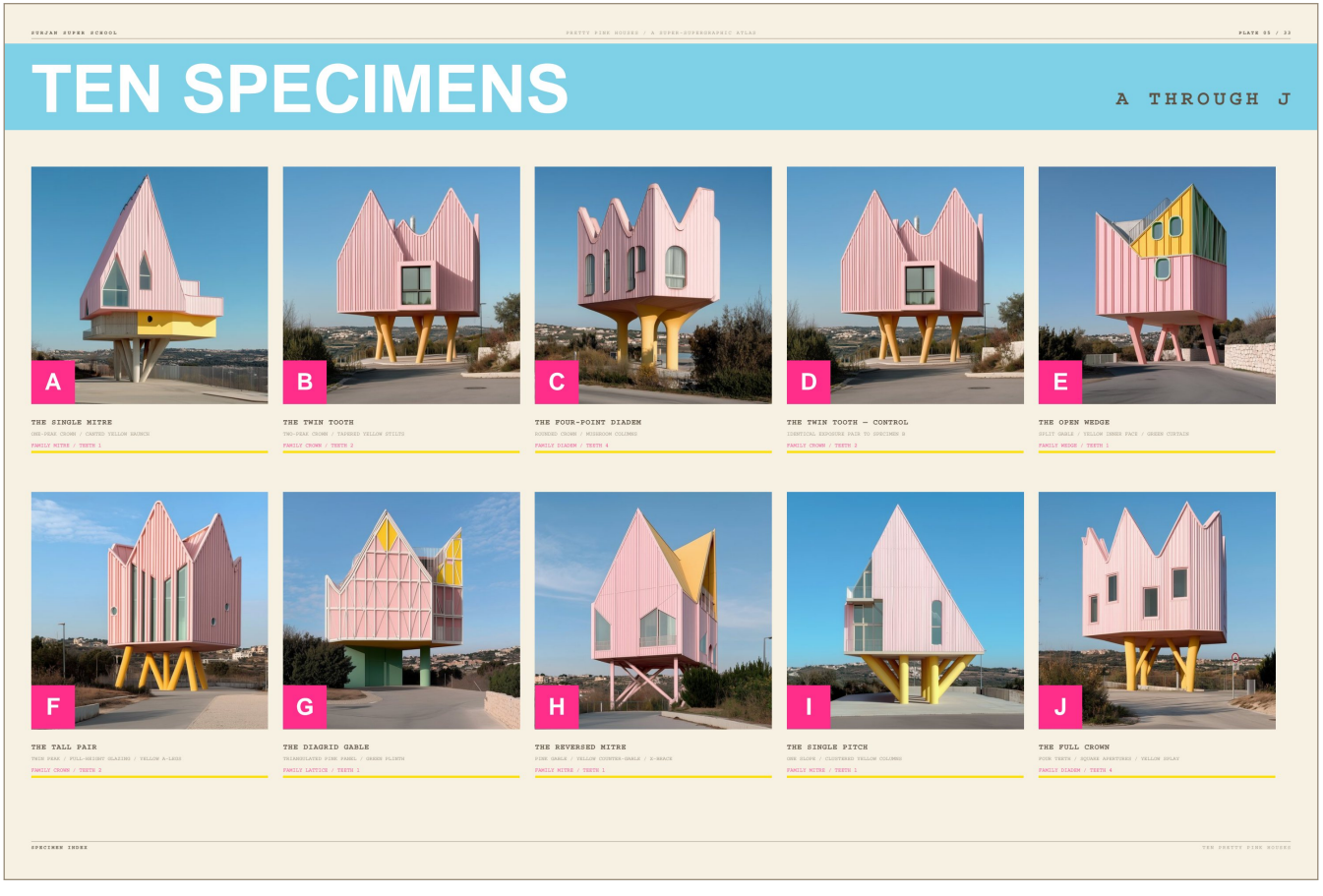
The Morning They Noticed

A house is a thing that waits to be spoken to. Twelve of them had been waiting a long time.



THE ISLAND SEEN FROM ABOVE IN THE FIRST SUMMER, THE TWELVE AT THEIR WALKING SIZE

The island seen from above in the first summer, the twelve at their walking size



THE TEN SPECIMENS, AS FIRST CATALOGUED

From A Super-Supergraphic Atlas, Volume One

SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL
PRETTY PINE HOUSES / A SUPER-SUPERGRAPHIC ATLAS
PLATE 14 / 33
CROWN SIGNATURES
A
THE SINGLE MITRE
TEETH 1 FAMILY MITRE PITCH 62 DEG
SIGNATURE NORMALISED TO CELL HEIGHT 380 PT
B
THE TWIN TOOTH
TEETH 2 FAMILY CROWN PITCH 48 DEG
SIGNATURE NORMALISED TO CELL HEIGHT 380 PT
C
THE FOUR-POINT DIADEM
TEETH 4 FAMILY DIADEM PITCH 55 DEG
SIGNATURE NORMALISED TO CELL HEIGHT 380 PT
D
THE TWIN TOOTH — CONTROL
TEETH 2 FAMILY CROWN PITCH 48 DEG
SIGNATURE NORMALISED TO CELL HEIGHT 380 PT
E
THE OPEN WEDGE
TEETH 2 FAMILY WEDGE PITCH 34 DEG
SIGNATURE NORMALISED TO CELL HEIGHT 380 PT
F
THE TALL PAIR
TEETH 2 FAMILY CROWN PITCH 58 DEG
SIGNATURE NORMALISED TO CELL HEIGHT 380 PT
G
THE DIAGRID GABLE
TEETH 1 FAMILY LATTICE PITCH 52 DEG
SIGNATURE NORMALISED TO CELL HEIGHT 380 PT
H
THE REVERSED MITRE
TEETH 1 FAMILY MITRE PITCH 60 DEG
SIGNATURE NORMALISED TO CELL HEIGHT 380 PT
I
THE SINGLE PITCH
TEETH 1 FAMILY MITRE PITCH 63 / 24 DEG
SIGNATURE NORMALISED TO CELL HEIGHT 380 PT
J
THE FULL CROWN
TEETH 4 FAMILY DIADEM PITCH 54 DEG
SIGNATURE NORMALISED TO CELL HEIGHT 380 PT
ALL TEN SIGNATURES ARE VARIATIONS ON A SINGLE OPERATION: A GABLE, REPEATED, THEN INTERRUPTED. TEETH RANGE 1 TO 4. NO SPECIMEN IS SYMMETRICAL.
COMPARATIVE CROWNS
TEN SIGNATURES AT ONE SCALE

CROWN SIGNATURES: TEN PROFILES AT ONE SCALE

From A Super-Supergraphic Atlas, Volume One

The Morning They Noticed

INÉS OKONKWO, nine, Battery Park City

The first thing I want to say is that nobody put her there.

Grown-ups kept saying somebody put her there, and then arguing about who, and then arguing about whether they were allowed, and then arguing about the arguing. My father said it was a scandal. My aunt said it was a masterpiece. My teacher said we would learn about it when we were older, which is the thing they say when they have not decided yet.

But she was there in the morning and she had not been there the night before, and I was the one who went out at ten to seven to look at the harbour like I do, and I am telling you that nobody put her there, because she was standing on her four yellow legs the way you stand when you have just arrived somewhere and are deciding whether to take your coat off.

She was pink all over in thin lines going up and down, like a jumper knitted very tight. She had two sharp points on top and a little one behind, like a person with their hood up and their hair sticking out. In her front she had three tall thin green windows, one long, one short, one in between, and they looked exactly like eyes that are trying not to look at you.

I said hello because it seemed rude not to.

She did not say anything back. But the wind, which had been going one way, went the other way, and the flag on the ferry terminal turned all the way around and slapped its pole, and a gull that had been standing on a

bollard fell off it.

I said hello again.

And she made the sound. I have tried nine times to write down the sound and here is the ninth try: it is the sound of the top of a milk bottle when you press it and it goes in. It is a small sound to come out of something that big. That is exactly what made me believe it.

I went and got my shoes properly on and came back and stayed until half past eight, which made me late, and I was not sorry.

Here is what I worked out that first day, sitting under her on the cold part of the pavement where the sun does not come until eleven.

One. She could see the water and she liked it.

Two. She could not see any of the others, but I did not know about the others yet, and neither, I think, did she.

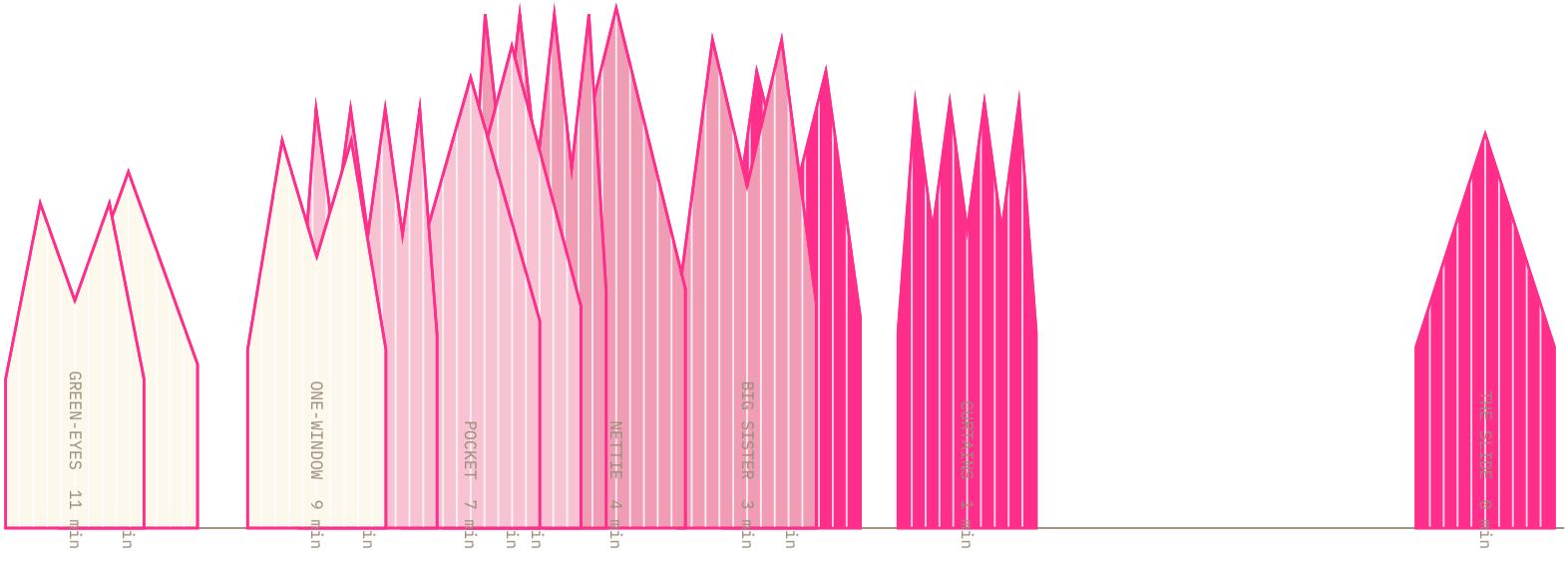
Three. She had come from somewhere and she was not going to say where, and after a while I stopped asking, because you should not ask people that.

Four. She was happy. Not pleased. Not fine. Happy, the loud kind, the kind that takes up room. I want to be clear that I noticed this on the very first morning, before anybody had explained anything to me and before the newspapers had started, because later on a lot of people said the houses were sad, or that they were a protest, or that they were about the future, and I was there, and they were not, and I am telling you: she was standing over the bottom of the island on four yellow legs at ten to seven in the morning being extremely happy about the water.

I called her Green-Eyes by lunchtime. It stuck.

ELEVEN MINUTES OF PINK

Every clear morning the light comes down the island from north to south, one house at a time.



The eleven minutes of pink: the light coming down the island at dawn

What a House Sounds Like When It Is Thinking

TOMÁS REYES, seven, Two Bridges

Mine is called Two-Ways because his pink roof goes that way and his yellow roof goes the other way, and where they meet there is a gap, and in the gap there is the sky, and sometimes a bird goes through the gap and comes out the other side and the bird does not know it has been through a house.

Two-Ways stands over the old piers where the fish used to be. Under him there is a big pink X made of metal, bigger than my whole school, and the bridge goes under one arm of the X and does not touch it. When the trucks go over the bridge the X hums. It hums in the note of the second-lowest string on the guitar my cousin has and never plays.

That is not him talking. I want to be careful, because Perpetua says we have to be careful. That is just the X doing what metal does.

Him talking is different. Him talking is when the humming stops.

I noticed it on a Tuesday. The trucks were still going and the X should have been humming and it was not humming, it was doing nothing at all, and it did nothing at all for as long as it takes to count to forty, and then it started again.

And I thought: that is what I do. That is exactly what I do when somebody asks me a question in class and I know the answer but I want to have it

properly in my mouth before I let it out. Everything in me stops. My foot stops going. My pencil stops. And then I say it.

So Two-Ways was thinking.

I told my sister and she said I was being weird. I told my grandmother and she said in her village a house that thinks is a house you should feed. I asked her what you feed it and she said what does it look like it wants, and I said the sky, because of the gap, and she said well then.

So on Wednesday I stood underneath the X and I did not say anything and I did not do anything. I just let him have the sky. I stood there for ages doing nothing on purpose, which is much harder than it sounds and which my mother has told me I am extremely good at.

And the humming stopped, and stayed stopped, and I counted to forty, and to eighty, and to a hundred and twenty, and I understood that he had stopped for me, and that we were doing it together, and that this was a conversation and that both of us were saying the same thing, which was: I am not in a hurry, are you in a hurry, no, good.

I have had better afternoons since but not many.

The Names We Gave Them

PERPETUA LIN, eleven, MacDougal Street

I am the one who made the list, so I should explain the rules, because there were rules, and because Ari keeps telling people there were no rules, and there were.

RULE ONE. You may only name the house you keep. You may not name somebody else's house. Deshawn broke this immediately by calling mine "Cyclops" and I have not forgiven him and I will not.

RULE TWO. The name has to be about a thing you can point at. Not about a feeling. Feelings change and then the name is a lie. Green-Eyes has green eyes. Four-Tooth has four teeth. Open-Mouth's mouth is open. If you want to give a house a name about a feeling then you have to be prepared to change it every week and nobody was.

RULE THREE. The house has to accept it. This sounds silly and it is not. When you say the right name the house does something. When you say the wrong name the house does nothing, which is worse than doing something. Nkechi went through eleven names for hers before she said Pocket and every window on the north side went dark at once and then came back on, and she said that is that then, and it was.

RULE FOUR. You do not name a house after a person. Solomon wanted to name his after his grandfather. Solomon's grandfather had died in the winter. We had a meeting about it on the steps of the library, which was the

only place all twelve of us could get to on a Saturday, and it took two hours, and in the end Solomon said it himself, before anybody had to say it to him: if I call her by his name then every time she goes anywhere I will think he has gone somewhere, and I will spend my whole life watching a house instead of remembering a person.

So she is called Twice, because she is standing in the water and the water has her in it too.

But I want it in the book that the rule came from Solomon and not from me, and that he made it while crying, and that afterwards he was fine, and that we all went and got ices.

RULE FIVE, added later, by all of us, unanimously, which never happened again: once a house has a name, that is the house's name. Not ours. We gave them away. You cannot take a name back once you have given it, that is the entire point of giving something.

Open-Mouth Laughs at Bryant Park

JUNO PARK, six, Murray Hill

Mine is laughing.

Everybody says she is not laughing, she is a roof that is split open, and the yellow is just what the inside of a roof is painted. Everybody says that. My brother says it in a voice.

But I have looked at every single one of the twelve now, on the bus and on the map and in real life for eight of them, and none of the others are open at the top. All the others are closed at the top, either in points or in bumps or in one long slide. Only mine is open. And when a thing is open at the top and yellow inside and it has been that way since the morning it arrived and it has never once shut, then either it is broken or it is laughing, and she is not broken, because everything else about her works.

I sat under her every day in June. Here is what happens to Bryant Park when a laughing house stands over it.

At about eleven the sun gets far enough round to come down into the yellow. Then the yellow throws the light back down. The whole park goes the colour of the inside of a peach. The people reading books look up. All of them, at the same time, look up. Then they look at each other, because they have all looked up at the same time, and then they laugh, because that is what people do when they all do the same thing by accident.

So my house makes a park full of strangers laugh once a day, at about

eleven, using nothing except the sun and paint.

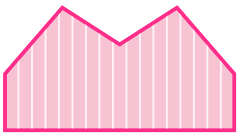
I said this to my mother and my mother said that is not laughing, that is physics.

I said what do you think laughing is.

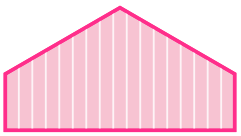
She did not have an answer and she took me for a sandwich, which is what she does.

THE TWELVE, AND THE NAMES THE CHILDREN GAVE THEM

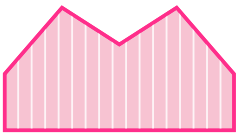
Rule two: the name has to be about a thing you can point at.



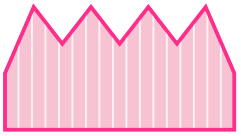
GREEN-EYES
The Battery
kept by Inés Okonkwo



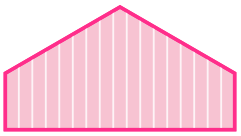
TWO-WAYS
South Street
kept by Tomás Reyes



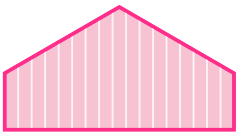
ONE-WINDOW
Washington Square
kept by Perpetua Lin



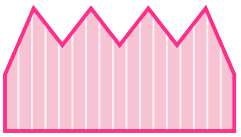
FOUR-TOOTH
Union Square
kept by Ari Gedalia



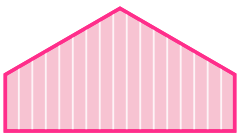
POCKET
Hudson Yards
kept by Nkechi Alvarez



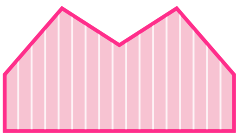
OPEN-MOUTH
Bryant Park
kept by Juno Park



WAVY
Duffy Square
kept by Deshawn Ferreira



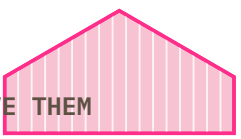
NETTIE
Columbus Circle
kept by Miriam Ashraf



BIG SISTER
The Great Lawn
kept by Winnie Castellanos

TWICE
The Reservoir
kept by Solomon Adeyemi

CURTAINS
Marcus Garvey Park
kept by Zaira Mendes



THE SLIDE
Inwood Hill
kept by Benedikt Kowalczyk

THE TWELVE, AND THE NAMES THE CHILDREN GAVE THEM

The twelve, and the names the children gave them

A Catalogue of Things Found Underneath

Compiled from all twelve notebooks, contributor unknown

Because the houses stand on legs, there is a space under each of them, and because the space is dry and out of the wind, things collect in it. The children catalogued what they found. The list is reproduced in the order in which it was written, which is no order at all.

Under GREEN-EYES, at the Battery: eleven ferry tickets, none of them from this year. A glove. A second glove, not matching, four months later, in a different place. A whistle that does not whistle. A folding chair belonging to a man named Errol who sits in it every day and who has asked to be named in this book, and is.

Under TWO-WAYS, at South Street: fish scales, obviously. A shoe. A tooth, human, small, milk. A shopping list on which the only legible word is BREAD. Six hundred and forty pigeons, counted once, on a Sunday, by two children who then disagreed about the number for a year.

Under ONE-WINDOW, at Washington Square: chess pieces, forty-one of them, none of them a complete set. A busker's amplifier, abandoned. Somebody's homework, done, unhanded-in. A ring, gold, thin, which was handed to the police and never claimed, and which Perpetua thinks about more than she says.

Under FOUR-TOOTH, at Union Square: greenmarket things — a bag of onion skins, a broken crate, three apples in a row on a beam where

somebody must have climbed to put them. Political leaflets from four different arguments. A skateboard with one wheel.

Under POCKET, over the rail cut: nothing at all, for eight months, because nothing can fall onto a train. Then, in the ninth month, a kite, which had come from Chelsea, and which stayed in the concrete room until the wind changed.

Under OPEN-MOUTH, at Bryant Park: books. Twenty-two of them. All returned. The library has a shelf for them now and a small sign, which does not explain anything.

Under WAVY, at Duffy Square: everything. Sequins. A single false eyelash. Ticket stubs from shows that closed years ago. A costume feather. A tap shoe, left foot. Money, quite a lot of it, in nine currencies. A tooth, human, adult, which nobody wants to talk about.

Under NETTIE, at Columbus Circle: leaves, from the park. A bicycle bell. A wedding invitation, unsent, still sealed. Rain, differently — Nettie's white net gathers rain and lets it go all at once, so that once a day there is a small private weather event underneath her, and the children counted this as a thing found.

Under BIG SISTER, over the Great Lawn: forty thousand people, on one particular evening in August, which is the largest thing ever found under any of them.

Under TWICE, in the Reservoir: her own reflection, which the children argued about including, and included.

Under CURTAINS, at Marcus Garvey Park: drums. Not lost — kept. There is a difference and Zaira insisted on it.

Under THE SLIDE, at Inwood: acorns, a great many. A fox, twice. And in the spring, an entire school of children on a trip, ninety of them, who all lay down on the concrete at once and looked straight up, and whom the house allowed.

The Problem, Stated Plainly by a Person Aged Eight

ARI GEDALIA, eight, Stuyvesant Town

Right so here is the problem and I worked it out first and Perpetua can say what she likes.

The houses can talk. Fine. Everybody knows that by now, it is in the book already, several times, I have read the earlier chapters and they are quite slow.

But who can they talk TO.

They can talk to us. That is one. That works because we are underneath them and we are close and we are not busy.

Can they talk to each other. That is two. And the answer is no and I will tell you exactly why.

I asked Four-Tooth about Green-Eyes. I said, do you know the one at the bottom of the island with the green windows. And Four-Tooth did the thing he does when he does not understand, which is that all four of his points go slightly quiet, the way a person's face goes when they are pretending to have heard you.

So I asked again but easier. I said: have you ever seen another house like you.

And every window on him went dark. All three. At the same time. And

stayed dark for a long time. And when they came back they were not the same brightness as before, they were dimmer, and they stayed dimmer for two days.

I felt awful. I want that written down. I felt completely awful because I had asked a question that turned out to be a horrible question, and I did not know it was horrible when I asked it, and knowing that does not help at all.

So then I did the thing my dad does when he has made a mess, which is get a piece of paper and be extremely organised about it.

I drew the island. I put a cross where each of the twelve was. I asked everybody in the group to measure how tall theirs was by counting how many buses would fit standing on top of each other, which is not a real measurement but it is a fair one because we all used the same buses.

And then I drew the buildings in between.

And that is when it was obvious, and I do not know why nobody had thought of it, and I was eight.

Green-Eyes at the bottom is about seventeen buses. In between Green-Eyes and everybody else there is the whole downtown, and the tallest thing in it is ninety buses tall. Big Sister on the lawn is about twenty-six buses. In between Big Sister and anybody south there is Central Park Tower, which is seventy-eight buses.

They are not blind. They are not deaf. They are just SHORT.

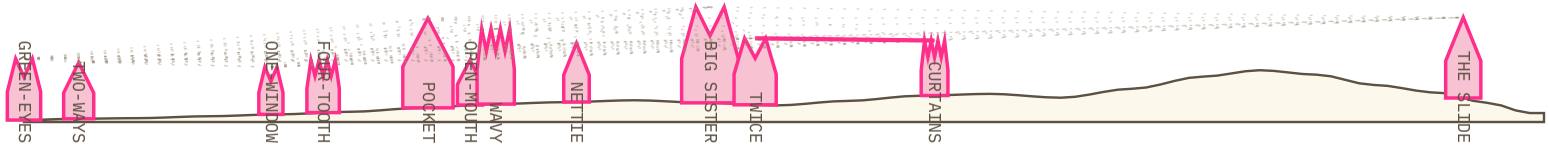
They are standing in a city that has spent two hundred years building things in front of them.

I took the drawing to the meeting on the library steps and put it down and did not say anything, because that is more impressive, and everybody looked at it, and Miriam said oh, and Winnie said oh no, and Solomon said it very quietly to himself about four times, and then Perpetua said the sentence that we all ended up using for the rest of the year:

They are not lonely because they are far apart. They are lonely because they are not big enough.

ONE LINE IN THIRTY-TWO

Only Twice and Curtains, two and a half miles apart over Harlem, could see one another.



What each house could see of the others, before

Big Sister Cannot See Anybody

WINNIE CASTELLANOS, eight, Yorkville

I am going to tell this bit because it is mine, even though it is the sad bit, and I am aware this is supposed to be a happy book, and it is, it is a very happy book, and I am telling you that this bit had to happen or the happy part does not work.

Big Sister is the biggest. She stands over the Great Lawn and she is two enormous points with a valley between them and there is nothing else to her — no funny windows, no yellow, no net, no curtains. Just pink and two points, over and over, a kilometre of it.

Because she is the biggest, everybody assumed she was the best off. Ari's drawing showed she could see further than anybody. She is in the middle of the island, up high, in the biggest empty space there is.

But being the tallest of the twelve does not help you at all if the thing in the way is not one of the twelve.

The thing in the way is a building on 57th Street that is seventy-eight buses of nothing. Nobody lives in most of it. It is a very thin very tall building for putting money in. It stands exactly between Big Sister and the whole of downtown, and it is not going anywhere.

So Big Sister, who is the largest object ever put on this island, and who could hold forty thousand people in her shade, and who can be seen from New Jersey and from Queens and from an aeroplane — Big Sister cannot

see a single one of her own family. Not one. Not ever. From the day she arrived.

I sat on the lawn all of one Sunday working out whether to tell her. Perpetua says you should never tell somebody a sad true thing unless you are also bringing them something to do about it. Perpetua is eleven and says things like that.

But I did not have anything to do about it. I was eight and I had a bicycle.

So I did not tell her. I sat on the grass and I told her about all of them instead. I said, there is one at the bottom of the island with three green windows and she is very interested in boats. There is one with a yellow inside who makes a park laugh at eleven o'clock. There is one wearing a white net. There is one standing in a lake. There is one right up at the top who is just one long slide and who has a fox.

I did that for four hours and at the end of it the wind came up the valley between her two points and it made the note, and the note was not a sad note.

And that is the thing I did not expect and the thing this whole book is about, and it is why I do not think the sad bit is sad.

She did not want to see them so that she would stop being lonely. She wanted to see them because she wanted to know what they looked like. Because she was interested. Because they were interesting.

Being told about them was not as good as seeing them. But it was not nothing. It was, in fact, nearly everything, and she made the note, and I lay back on the grass in her shadow which is a mile wide, and I thought: right. Right. We are going to fix this.

From the Book of Not Being Bored

First gathering: fragments from the twelve notebooks

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1. I have decided that a thing is interesting if it is still doing something when you look at it twice. — TOMÁS

7. Today I was bored for one hour and eleven minutes and then it stopped because a cloud went behind Nettie's net and came out cut into triangles. Nothing else happened all day. That was enough. — MIRIAM

12. My mother says I stare. I do not stare. Staring is when you look at something and get nothing. I am not getting nothing. — JUNO

19. Deshawn says Wavy is the best one because she is in Times Square and gets the most attention. I said that is like saying the best person is the one who is looked at most, and he said yes, and I said think about that for one minute, and he did, and he came back the next day and said all right, fine. — PERPETUA

24. I asked Curtains what curtains are for. She did the slow warm thing on the south side. I think curtains are for when you want to be at home and not at work. None of the others get to be at home. They are all standing in public all the time. — ZAIRA

31. Being big is not the same as being important. Being important is not the same as being happy. I have written this down so that I do not forget it, because I keep forgetting it. — ARI

38. There is a man who sleeps under Green-Eyes on the warm side. She is

warm on one side. She is warm on the side he sleeps on. I do not think that is an accident and I have stopped trying to prove it. — INÉS

44. What I like about Pocket is that he carries things. Everything else on this island is either being carried or is refusing to carry anything. — NKECHI

52. My grandfather is dead and my house is standing in a lake being two of herself. Those are the two true things about this year. I do not think they are connected. I have put them on the same page anyway. — SOLOMON

58. The fox came back. Same fox. I know because of the ear. — BENEDIKT

63. If you lie down under a house and put your hands flat on the concrete you can feel the whole island being busy underneath, all the trains, all the pipes, all of it. And the house is standing on that. And you are lying on it. So you and the house are on the same thing. That is what standing on legs is FOR. — WINNIE

66. Nobody has asked us how we are. Everybody has asked us how the houses are. We are fine. We are having the best year of our lives. — DESHAWN

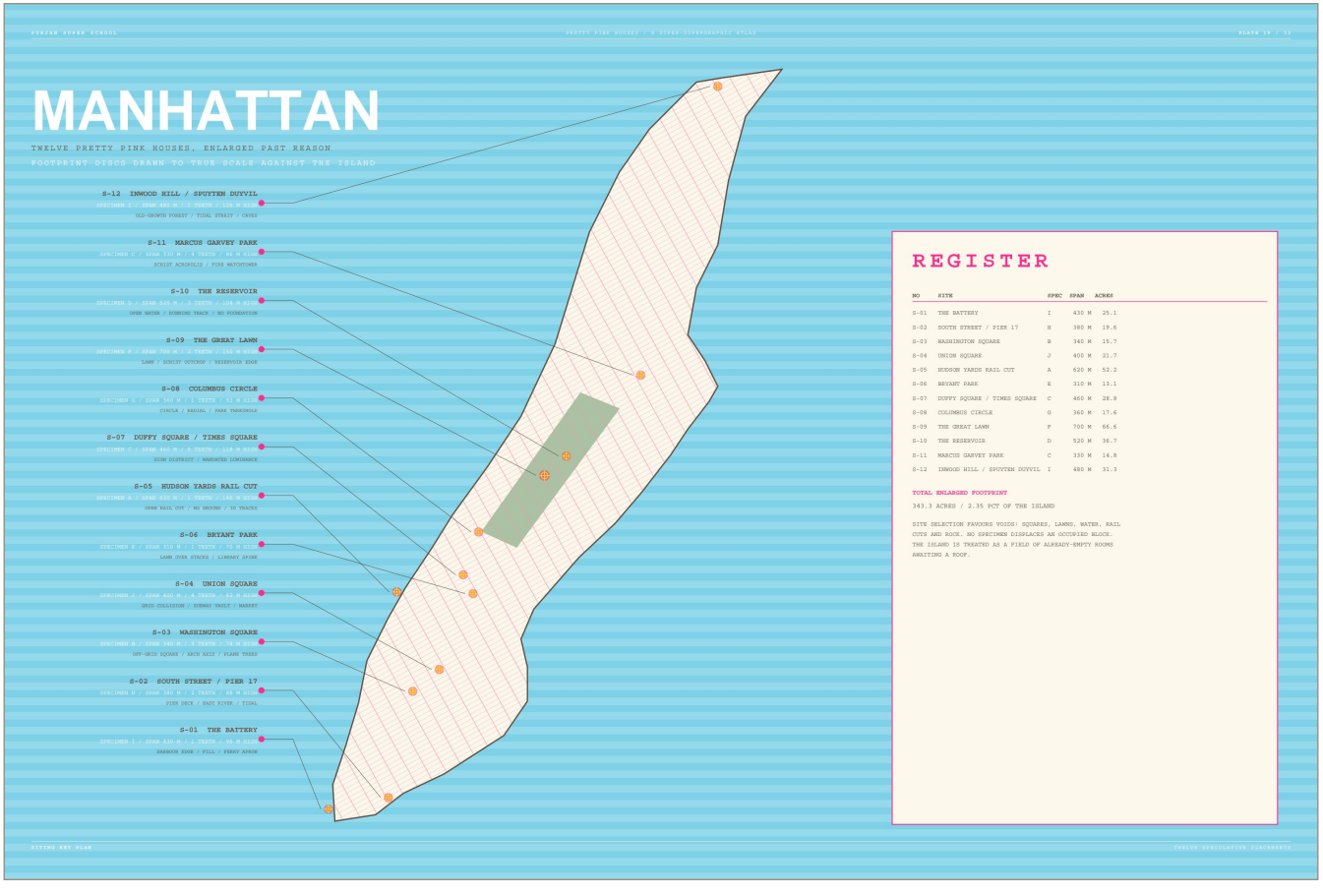
PART TWO

The Conversation Problem

Twelve of one kind on one island, and eleven of them had never been seen by another.

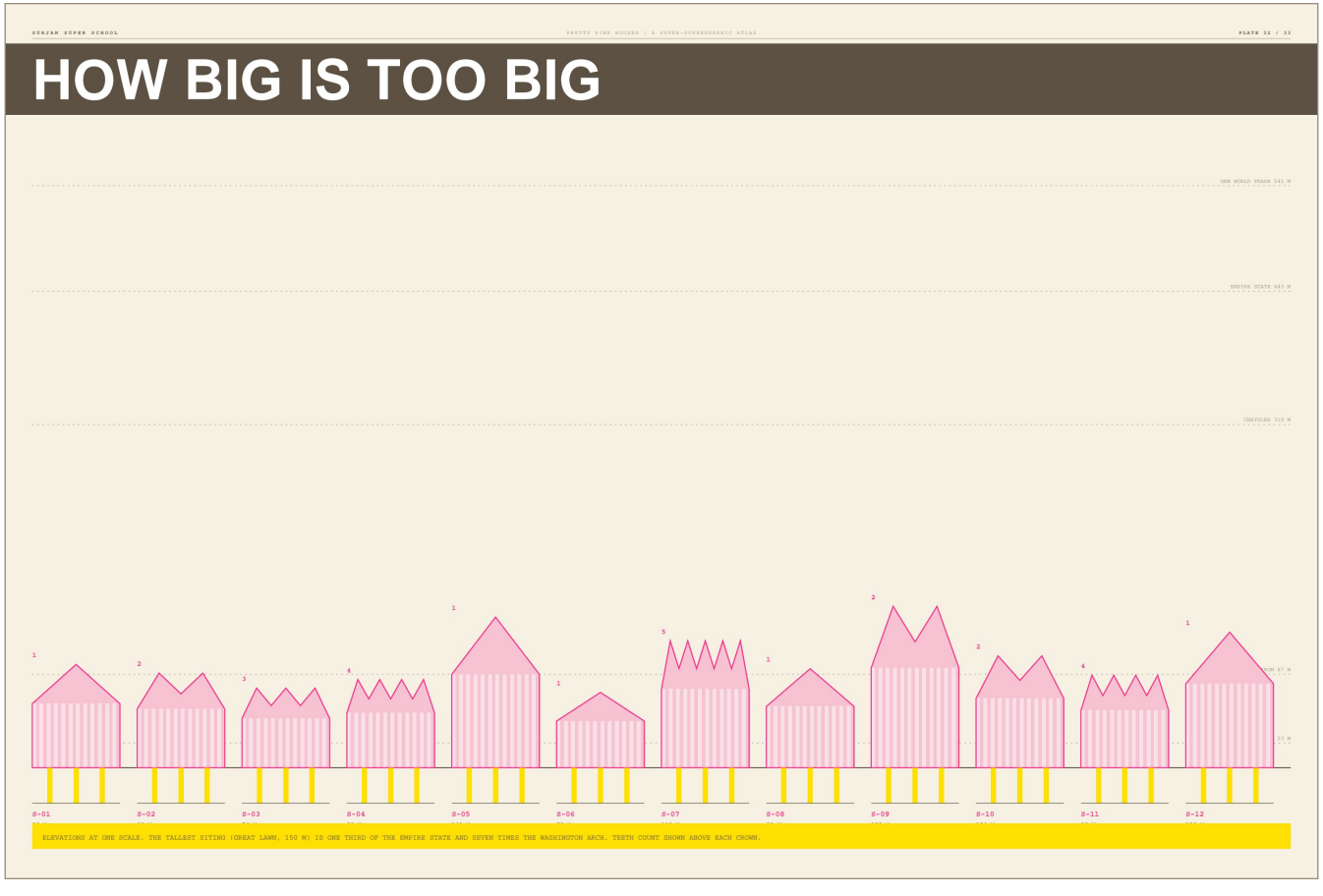
TWELVE CROWNS ON ONE ISLAND: GREEN-EYES AT THE HARBOUR, THE SLIDE AT THE TOP

Twelve crowns on one island: Green-Eyes at the harbour, the Slide at the top


SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL
PRETTY PINK HOUSES / A SUPER-SUPERGRAPHIC ATLAS
PLATE IX / XX
MANHATTAN
TWELVE PRETTY PINK HOUSES, ENLARGED PAST REASON
FOOTPRINT DISCS DRAWN TO TRUE SCALE AGAINST THE ISLAND
S-12 INWOOD HILL / SPUYTEN DUYVIL
SPECIMEN I / SPAN 480 M / 1 TEETH / 126 M RISE
OLD-GROWTH FOREST / TIDAL STRAIT / CAVES
S-11 MARCUS GARVEY PARK
SPECIMEN C / SPAN 330 M / 1 TEETH / 84 M RISE
SCHIST ACROPOLIS / FIRE WATCHTOWER
S-10 THE RESERVOIR
SPECIMEN D / SPAN 520 M / 2 TEETH / 104 M RISE
OPEN WATER / RUNNING TRACK / NO FOUNDATION
S-09 THE GREAT LAWN
SPECIMEN F / SPAN 700 M / 2 TEETH / 150 M RISE
LAWN / SCHIST OUTCROP / RESERVOIR EDGE
S-08 COLUMBUS CIRCLE
SPECIMEN G / SPAN 360 M / 1 TEETH / 92 M RISE
CIRCLE / RADIAL / PARK THRESHOLD
S-07 DUFFY SQUARE / TIMES SQUARE
SPECIMEN C / SPAN 460 M / 1 TEETH / 118 M RISE
SIGN DISTRICT / MANDATED LUMINANCE
S-05 HUDSON YARDS RAIL CUT
SPECIMEN A / SPAN 620 M / 1 TEETH / 160 M RISE
OPEN RAIL CUT / NO GROUND / NO TRACKS
S-06 BRYANT PARK
SPECIMEN E / SPAN 310 M / 1 TEETH / 75 M RISE
LAWN OVER STACKS / LIBRARY SPINE
S-04 UNION SQUARE
SPECIMEN J / SPAN 400 M / 1 TEETH / 92 M RISE
GRID COLLISION / SUBWAY VAULT / MARKET
S-03 WASHINGTON SQUARE
SPECIMEN B / SPAN 340 M / 1 TEETH / 74 M RISE
OFF-GRID SQUARE / ARCH AXIS / PLANE THREE
S-02 SOUTH STREET / PIER 17
SPECIMEN H / SPAN 380 M / 1 TEETH / 84 M RISE
PIER DECK / EAST RIVER / TIDAL
S-01 THE BATTERY
SPECIMEN I / SPAN 430 M / 1 TEETH / 94 M RISE
HARBOUR EDGE / FILL / FERRY APRON
SITING KEY PLAN
TWELVE SPECULATIVE PLACEMENTS
REGISTER
NO SITE SPEC SPAN ACRES
S-01 THE BATTERY I 430 M 25.1
S-02 SOUTH STREET / PIER 17 H 380 M 19.6
S-03 WASHINGTON SQUARE B 340 M 15.7
S-04 UNION SQUARE J 400 M 21.7
S-05 HUDSON YARDS RAIL CUT A 620 M 52.2
S-06 BRYANT PARK E 310 M 13.1
S-07 DUFFY SQUARE / TIMES SQUARE C 460 M 28.8
S-08 COLUMBUS CIRCLE G 360 M 17.6
S-09 THE GREAT LAWN F 700 M 66.6
S-10 THE RESERVOIR D 520 M 36.7
S-11 MARCUS GARVEY PARK C 330 M 14.8
S-12 INWOOD HILL / SPUYTEN DUYVIL I 480 M 31.3
TOTAL ENLARGED FOOTPRINT
343.3 ACRES / 2.35 PCT OF THE ISLAND
SITE SELECTION FAVOURS VOIDS: SQUARES, LAWNS, WATER, RAIL CUTS AND ROCK. NO SPECIMEN DISPLACES AN OCCUPIED BLOCK. THE ISLAND IS TREATED AS A FIELD OF ALREADY-EMPTY ROOMS AWAITING A ROOF.

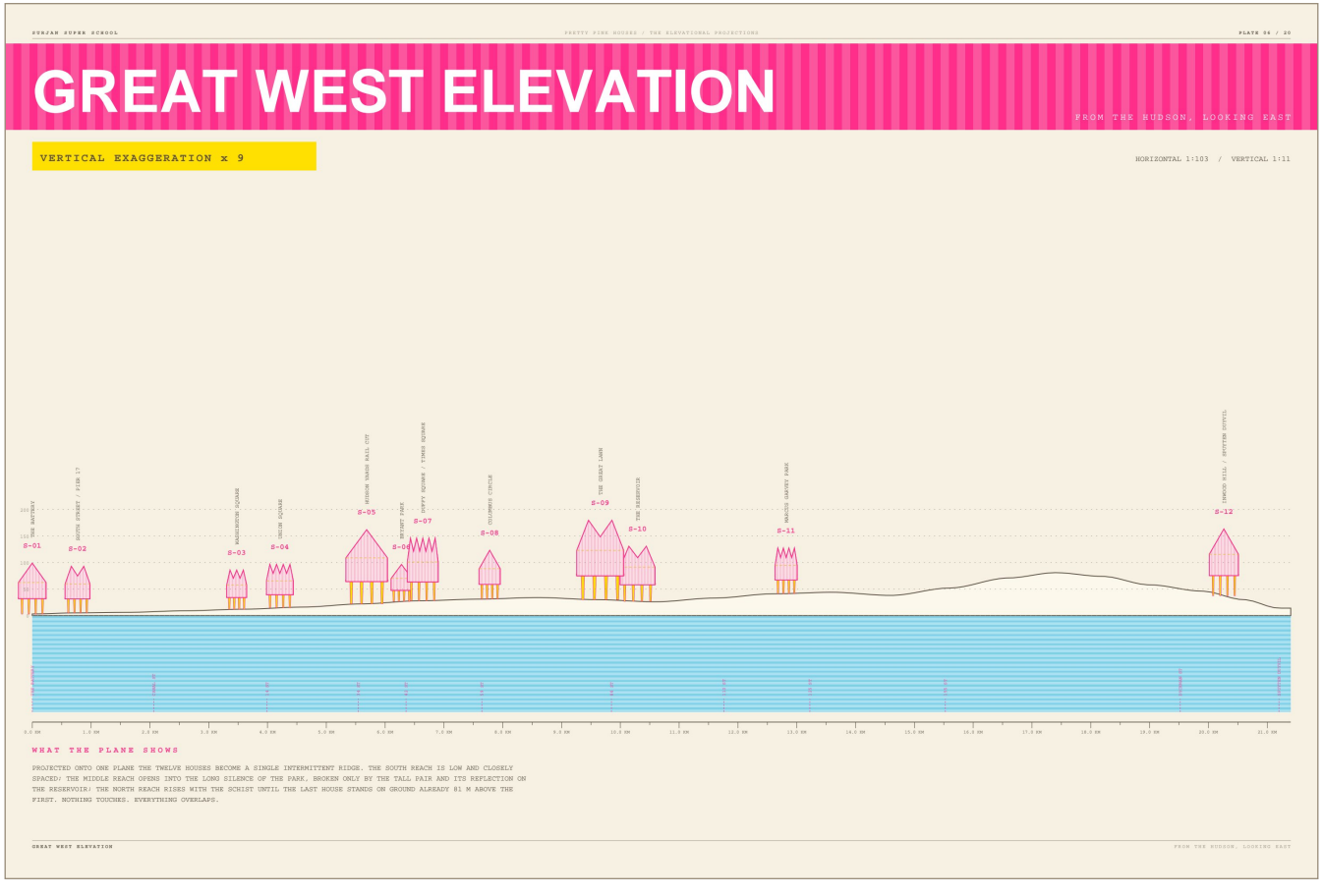
THE SITING KEY PLAN: TWELVE PLACEMENTS ON THE ISLAND

From A Super-Supergraphic Atlas, Volume One



COMPARATIVE SCALE: THE TWELVE AGAINST THE ISLAND

From A Super-Supergraphic Atlas, Volume One


SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL
PRETTY PINK HOUSES / THE ELEVATIONAL PROJECTIONS
PLATE 06 / 20
GREAT WEST ELEVATION
FROM THE HUDSON, LOOKING EAST
VERTICAL EXAGGERATION x 9
HORIZONTAL 1:103 / VERTICAL 1:11
THE BATTERY
SOUTH STREET / PIER 17
S-01
S-02
WASHINGTON SQUARE
UNION SQUARE
S-03
S-04
HUDSON YARDS RAIL CUT
S-05
ZUCCOTTI PARK
S-06
SOHO SQUARE / TIMES SQUARE
S-07
COLUMBUS CIRCLE
S-08
THE GREAT LAWN
S-09
THE RESERVOIR
S-10
MARCUS GARVEY PARK
S-11
HAMOND HILL / HAVEN BLUFFS
S-12
WHAT THE PLANE SHOWS
PROJECTED ONTO ONE PLANE THE TWELVE HOUSES BECOME A SINGLE INTERMITTENT RIDGE. THE SOUTH REACH IS LOW AND CLOSELY SPACED; THE MIDDLE REACH OPENS INTO THE LONG SILENCE OF THE PARK, BROKEN ONLY BY THE TALL PAIR AND ITS REFLECTION ON THE RESERVOIR; THE NORTH REACH RISES WITH THE SCHIST UNTIL THE LAST HOUSE STANDS ON GROUND ALREADY 81 M ABOVE THE FIRST. NOTHING TOUCHES. EVERYTHING OVERLAPS.
GREAT WEST ELEVATION
FROM THE HUDSON, LOOKING EAST

THE GREAT WEST ELEVATION, THE WHOLE ISLAND ON ONE PICTURE PLANE

From The Elevational Projections, Volume Two

Twice and Curtains, the Only Two Who Could

SOLOMON ADEYEMI, ten, Manhattan Valley

There was one pair. Out of all of them. One.

Twice stands in the water of the Reservoir with her ochre legs in it, and Curtains stands two and a half miles north over Marcus Garvey Park, and between the two of them there is nothing tall.

There is the cathedral, which is enormous but is only about a fifth of the way up. There is Harlem, which is beautiful and low and has kept its cornice line for a hundred and forty years, which turns out to be the single most useful fact in this entire book. There is the north end of the park. And that is it. Two and a half miles of nothing in the way.

So Twice and Curtains can see each other. Actually see. Not be told about. Not imagine.

I found this out by accident and I found it out because of the curtains, which is funny, because the curtains are the whole reason Zaira's house is called Curtains and the reason the other houses find her slightly ridiculous.

Here is what happened. I was at the Reservoir at seven in the evening in July, on the track, on the south side, where you can look north up the whole length of the water. And Twice went bright. Not lit — she does not have lights. Bright, the way a person goes bright.

And I turned round to see what she was looking at, and two and a half miles away over Harlem the sun was going down behind Curtains, and

Curtains had her curtains open, all four arches, and the light was going straight through her and coming out the other side.

She was letting the light through on purpose. She had opened up so that a house at the other end of the park could see the sunset through her body.

I want to say something about that and then I will stop, because I am ten and I do not have the words for it, and Perpetua says you should stop when you run out of words rather than borrowing worse ones.

The thing is that Curtains did not have to do that. Nobody made her. She could have just watched the sunset herself. Instead she made herself into a window for somebody else.

And Twice went bright, and stayed bright, and it went on for about eleven minutes, and then the sun went and they both went normal, and the runners kept running past me on the track and none of them looked up once.

What the Towers Said

ZAIRA MENDES, seven, Harlem

I asked Curtains what the tall buildings were like.

I meant the ones downtown that get in everybody's way. The needle ones. The ones that are only thin and only tall and have nothing else about them.

Curtains did the thing with the curtains, which is her way of thinking — one arch at a time, closed, open, closed, open, going along.

And then she told me, and I am going to write down what I understood and not more than that, because Perpetua's rule is that you write what you understood, not what you would like to have understood.

She said the tall thin buildings do not talk.

Not: they will not talk. Not: they refuse. They do not.

I said is it because they are rude.

She did the arches again and I understood that it was not rudeness. It was that there is nothing in them. Not empty — there are floors and lifts and marble and everything. But nobody has ever stood under one of them at ten to seven in the morning and said hello twice. And a building that has never once been said hello to has never had to answer, and a thing that has never had to answer does not develop a way of answering.

I said that is sad.

And Curtains did something I had never seen and have only seen four times since. She warmed. The whole south face, all at once, like when

somebody puts their hand on your back.

And what I understood was: yes, it is a bit sad, and also you are seven, and also we are not going to spend the afternoon being sad about buildings that are perfectly comfortable.

Then she opened all four curtains and the sun came through and made four arches of light on the grass in the park and about nine people came over to stand in them without knowing why.

The Meeting at the Reservoir at Four in the Morning

Assembled from four accounts, principally that of DESHAWN FERREIRA, twelve, Clinton

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It had to be four in the morning because that is the only hour when twelve children can be in the same place in this city without somebody phoning somebody.

Getting there is its own story and it is not in this book, because two of us are still not allowed to talk about it, and because Benedikt came the whole way down from Inwood on a bicycle with no lights, which was extremely stupid and which he is very proud of.

We met on the running track on the south side of the Reservoir with Twice standing in the water in front of us, ochre legs in, doubled underneath, absolutely still. It was cold for July. There was mist on the water. Solomon had brought a flask and Miriam had brought her father's site drawings which she was not supposed to have.

Ari put down the buses drawing.

Perpetua put down the rules.

Winnie said the thing about Big Sister not being able to see anybody, and had to say it twice because her voice went.

Then we did the arguing. It went on for about an hour and forty minutes. I am going to put down the actual positions, because when people write

about this afterwards they always make it sound like we all agreed immediately and were adorable, and we did not and we were not.

NKECHI said: knock down the tall thin ones. She was serious for at least twenty minutes.

MIRIAM said: you cannot knock things down, we are children, and also her father designs buildings and she has feelings about it.

TOMÁS said: move the houses. Put them all in a line where they can see each other. He was seven and this was actually the best idea anyone had all night and we told him it was silly, and it was not silly, and it is what eventually happened, and I would like to apologise to Tomás in print.

INÉS said: dig. Make the city lower. This got a lot of support and then somebody pointed out the subway.

BENEDIKT said nothing for an hour and then said one sentence: make them taller.

And everybody said no because that is not how buildings work.

And Benedikt said, in the tone of somebody who has ridden a bicycle nine miles in the dark, none of this is how buildings work.

And then it was quiet for a bit. And then Perpetua said all right, how tall.

And Ari, who had the drawing and the buses, did it out loud, slowly, in front of everybody, on the back of the drawing, in the dark, with Solomon holding a phone for light.

The tallest thing in the city is ninety buses. To see over ninety buses from anywhere on the island you need to be more than ninety buses. To see over ninety buses and still be able to talk properly and not have to shout, you want to be about twice ninety. So: a hundred and eighty buses. Two hundred to be safe.

Two hundred buses.

Somebody laughed. I think it was me.

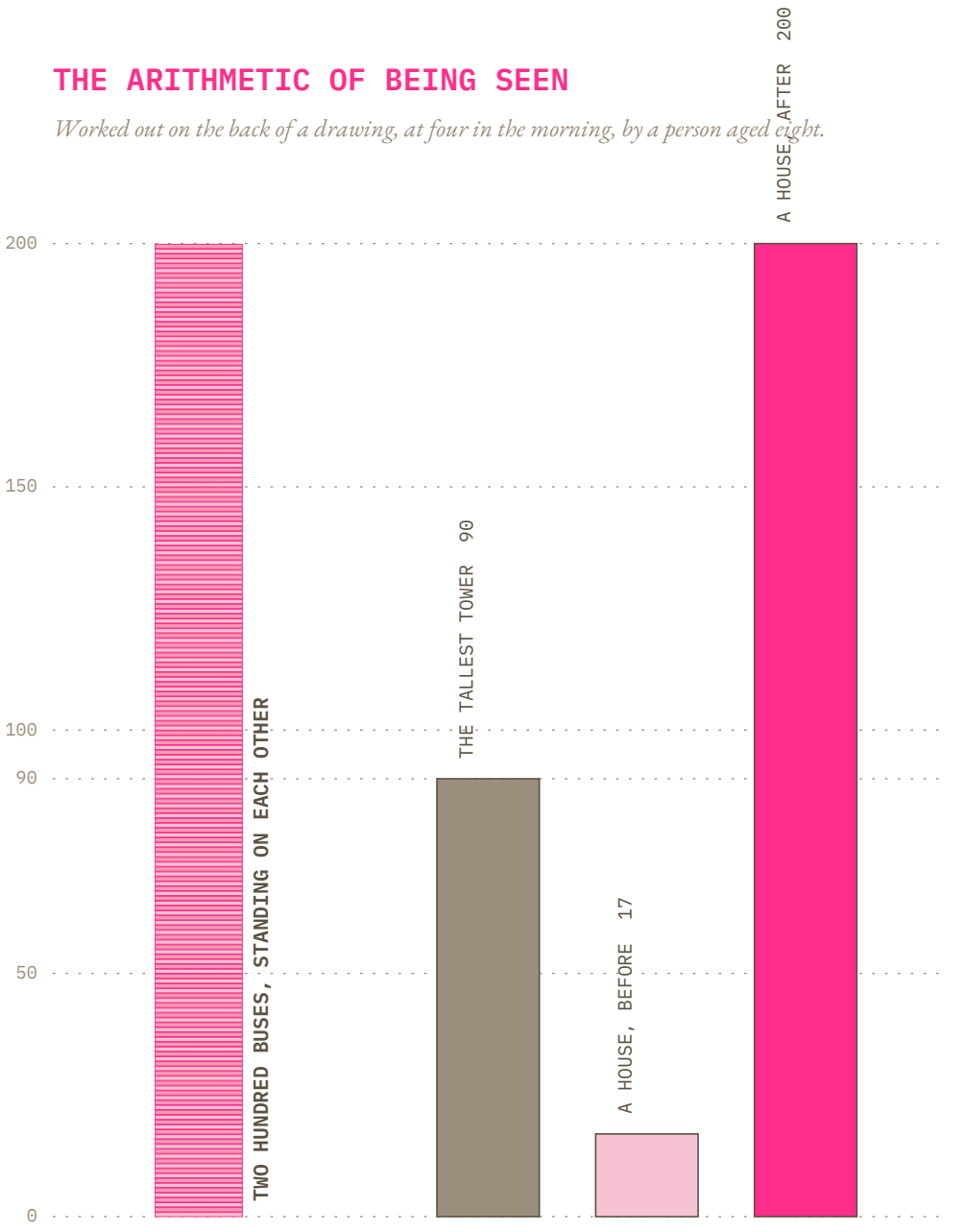
And Winnie said: so what. So what if it is ridiculous. Say the number again.

And Ari said: two hundred buses.

And Winnie said: fine. Two hundred buses. Ask them.

THE ARITHMETIC OF BEING SEEN

Worked out on the back of a drawing, at four in the morning, by a person aged eight.



Two hundred buses: the arithmetic of being seen

The Arithmetic of Being Seen

MIRIAM ASHRAF, nine, Lincoln Square

My father designs buildings, so I want to be the one to explain the technical part, and I have checked all of it with him, in a way, without telling him what it was for.

You cannot see a thing if there is another thing in front of it. That is the whole of it. Everything else is arithmetic.

If you are standing at the bottom of the island and you want to see something at the top of the island, you have to be higher than everything in between, and everything in between includes: the Financial District, which is a wall; the setback blocks of the Garment District, which are a lower wall; the whole of Midtown, which is the tallest continuous wall of buildings on the surface of the earth; and then, after the park, a long low friendly stretch where you can finally relax, and then the high ground of the Heights, which is not buildings, it is the island itself getting taller.

I made a drawing of it as a line. Just one line, going from the Battery to Inwood, with the height of the tallest thing at every point along the way. It looks like a heart monitor. It looks like the noise a city makes.

And then I drew the houses on it at the height they actually were, which was about a hundred metres, and they disappeared. They were bumps in the bottom of the line. You could not tell which bumps were the houses and which bumps were car parks.

And then I drew them at two hundred buses.

And I want to describe what that drawing looked like, because I still have it, and it is the reason I am going to do what my father does.

Everything the city had ever built became a floor.

That is all. That is the whole change. It did not make the city small. It did not make the city ugly. It made the city into a floor, a beautiful complicated floor, with a hundred and eighty years of arguing built into it, and twelve pink things standing on the floor, at last able to see over the furniture.

I showed it to Nettie. I could not really show it to her, she is nine hundred metres of building, but I held it up, which is what you do.

And Nettie's white net, which is triangles all over her front, did the thing where the sun goes through it and puts triangles of light on the pavement. And the triangles came down all around me. All around where I was standing, in a ring, and not on me.

I have thought about that for a long time and I think what it meant was: yes, and we will not stand on you.

How a House Grows

NKECHI ALVAREZ, ten, Hell's Kitchen

People always want to know how, and there is no how, and I am the one who has to say it because it happened over my house first.

Pocket stands over the rail cut. Thirty tracks. Nothing under him but trains and air. He is the one with the concrete room and the yellow room slung underneath, which is why he is called Pocket, and he is the one that adults find most disturbing, because he does not stand on the ground at all.

The night it happened I was on the roof of my building, which I am allowed on, and it was the ninth of August and it was so hot that the tar was soft.

He did not shoot up. Nobody would believe that anyway.

He grew the way a plant grows, which is to say: he grew the way a plant grows when you film it for three weeks and play it in one minute. Slow if you were watching a bit of him. Impossible if you looked away and looked back.

It took from about eleven at night until about half past four in the morning. I watched all of it. I was not tired once.

The ribs stayed the same width apart, which is what I noticed first and which is the thing that made me understand it was not magic, or not only magic. Every rib on him is the same distance from the next rib. When he got bigger, there were just more ribs. He did not stretch. He kept his own

grain and made more of it.

The yellow room got bigger too. The concrete room got bigger. The gap between them stayed exactly the same shape. Everything stayed in proportion, and that is the part I want to insist on, because a lot of people said afterwards that the houses became something else that night, and they did not. He was exactly the same house at half past four as he was at eleven. He was just more of it.

At about two in the morning his crown went past the top of the building on Tenth Avenue.

At about three he went past the tall thin ones on 57th.

At twenty past three, at the top of his rake, something happened that I did not understand until later, when Ari explained it with the drawing.

He stopped growing for about a minute. Just stopped. And then he turned. Not all of him — houses cannot turn — but the crown, the top, made a movement of about a hand's width, north.

North is Big Sister. North is Twice, and Curtains, and the Slide.

He had come up over the top of the city, and he had looked, and there they were.

And then he carried on growing, faster, and he did not stop again.

THE NIGHT OF THE GROWING

Pocket, over the rail cut, the ninth of August, from eleven at night until half past four.

The night of the growing, hour by hour

The Night of the Growing

Assembled from all twelve notebooks

It went down the island and up the island at the same time, and no two children saw it the same way, so here is all of it at once, which is how it should be read.

At Bryant Park, JUNO, aged six, was asleep and was woken by her mother, who had never once believed a word of any of it, and who stood at the window saying oh my god, oh my god, oh my god, in a small voice, and then, without turning round, said: Juno. Juno, come and look. Which Juno regards as the greatest victory of her life.

At Washington Square, PERPETUA counted. She counted the storeys of one of the buildings on the north side of the square and used it as a ruler and made a mark on the window with a wax pencil every ten minutes, and she has the window still, unwashed, and there are twenty-seven marks on it.

At the Battery, INÉS could not see anything at all, because there was fog, and she stood in the fog for five hours listening to Green-Eyes get further away above her, which she says was worse and better than seeing it.

At Union Square, ARI was not there, because he was grounded, and this is the great sorrow of his life and he mentions it constantly.

At Times Square, DESHAWN had the best view anyone had, and gave it away — he went and got the man who sells the roasted nuts on the corner of 46th, who had been kind to him, and who did not have any children of

his own, and the two of them watched the whole thing from the traffic island. Deshawn wrote down what the man said at three in the morning and it is the best line in any of the notebooks. He said: I have been standing on this corner for nineteen years and this is the first time anything up there has been for me.

At Columbus Circle, MIRIAM watched the white net grow. This was, everybody agrees, the strangest part of the whole night. The net is triangles. When Nettie grew, the triangles stayed the same shape but there got to be more of them, so it looked like something being knitted very fast by nobody, a white lattice climbing up into the dark, making itself, triangle after triangle, hour after hour.

At the Reservoir, SOLOMON watched two of them do it — Twice in the air and Twice in the water — and says it was the only time he has ever been jealous of a house.

At Marcus Garvey Park, ZAIRA watched from the roof of her building with her mother and her aunt and her aunt's friend and eventually about forty people, and somebody brought a speaker, and by two in the morning it had turned into a party, and by four it had turned into a party with drumming, and Curtains opened all four of her arches and left them open until dawn.

At Inwood, BENEDIKT was the last. The Slide is the furthest north and the growing reached her last, at about four, when the sky was already going grey at the edges. He had ridden nine miles home to see it. He watched one long pink rake climb up out of the trees until it was standing over the whole northern end of the island like a hand held up in a classroom.

And on the Great Lawn, WINNIE was lying on the grass on her back, in the dark, which she was absolutely not supposed to be doing, waiting.

The Morning After, and Sixty-Six Lines

WINNIE CASTELLANOS, eight, Yorkville

I stayed all night. I have never been in trouble like it, before or since, and I would do it again in a heartbeat and my mother knows this and it is one of the reasons she looks at me the way she does.

Big Sister grew last but one. She started at about half past midnight and she went on until nearly five, longer than anybody, because she had further to go, because she is the biggest.

I could not really see her growing because I was directly underneath her, and directly underneath a thing is the worst place to see it. What I could see was the sky between her two points, and the strip of sky got narrower and narrower and then, at some point, stopped getting narrower and started getting further away.

At about four the wind changed and got colder and cleaner, which is what happens when you go up, except I had not gone up, she had, and she had brought the weather down with her.

At twenty past five it got light, the way it does in August, all at once and from the wrong side.

And I sat up, and I looked south down the length of the island, which from the Great Lawn is straight down the middle of everything.

And there they were.

All of them. Every single one.

Green-Eyes at the very bottom with the harbour behind her. Two-Ways with his yellow roof catching the first sun. One-Window. Four-Tooth. Pocket over the rail cut with his two rooms hanging under him. Open-Mouth, wide open, yellow, laughing, obviously laughing, nobody can tell me anything. Wavy over Times Square, all four of her rounded teeth in a row. Nettie in her white net at the Circle. And behind me, north, Twice standing in the water and Curtains over Harlem and, far away at the very top, one long pink rake against the sky, which was the Slide, whom I had never seen and who I had been told about for a year.

And the whole city was underneath. All of it. Every tower, every bridge, every needle building on 57th Street. All of it, at last, underneath, being a floor.

I did the maths later with Ari because he insisted. Twelve houses. Every one able to see every other one. That is sixty-six pairs. Sixty-six lines.

Every single one of them clear.

Here is the last thing and then I will let somebody else talk.

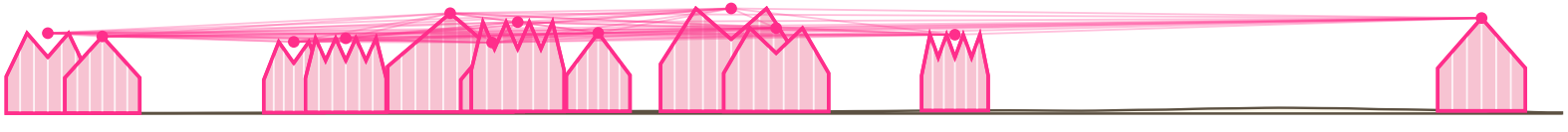
I expected it to be quiet. I thought it would be a big solemn moment and everybody would be very moved.

It was not quiet. It was the loudest thing I have ever heard in my life and it did not come from any one of them, it came from all of them at once, and it was not a note and it was not a word and the closest I can get is that it was the sound of a room full of people who have all just got a joke at the same time.

And it went on for eleven minutes. And there is a recording of it, made by a woman in an apartment on Fifth Avenue who thought it was an earthquake, and if you slow the recording down you can hear that it is not one sound, it is twelve sounds, and that they are not the same, and that they are answering each other.

SIXTY-SIX OF SIXTY-SIX

The morning after the growing: every line between every pair of them, clear.



Sixty-six of sixty-six: every line clear

From the Book of Not Being Bored

Second gathering

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71. Grown-ups keep saying WHY. They have been saying WHY for a week. Nobody has said WHY to us, because we know why, and it is because they could not see each other, and that is not a complicated reason, it is the most ordinary reason there has ever been. — INÉS

74. My father came home and did not speak for an hour and then said: the proportions held. He said it about four times. He was not upset. I think he was relieved, and I think he was relieved about something he has never said out loud to anybody. — MIRIAM

78. Being able to see your family is not the same as being with them. But it is not nothing. Twice has spent the whole week just LOOKING. — SOLOMON

83. I asked Open-Mouth if it hurt. She did the eleven o'clock thing at half past two in the afternoon, which is not the right time, and the whole park looked up in the wrong hour, and I take that as a no. — JUNO

86. Nobody has painted them. That is what I keep noticing. They got twenty times bigger and they are still pink and nobody has painted an advert on any of them and I do not think anybody is going to. — DESHAWN

91. Two-Ways has a bigger gap now so the birds have got further to go. Some of them turn round halfway. — TOMÁS

95. The word for it is not "huge". Huge is about how you feel looking at it. The word is "enough". They are, at last, enough. — PERPETUA

99. Fox unbothered. — BENEDIKT

104. I keep thinking about the fact that the answer to loneliness was not company. It was height. That cannot be right and it was right. — ARI

108. Everybody wants to talk about how big they are. Nobody has asked what they are saying. — ZAIRA

111. What they are saying, mostly, so far, is: there you are. There you are. There you are. Over and over. For a week. — WINNIE

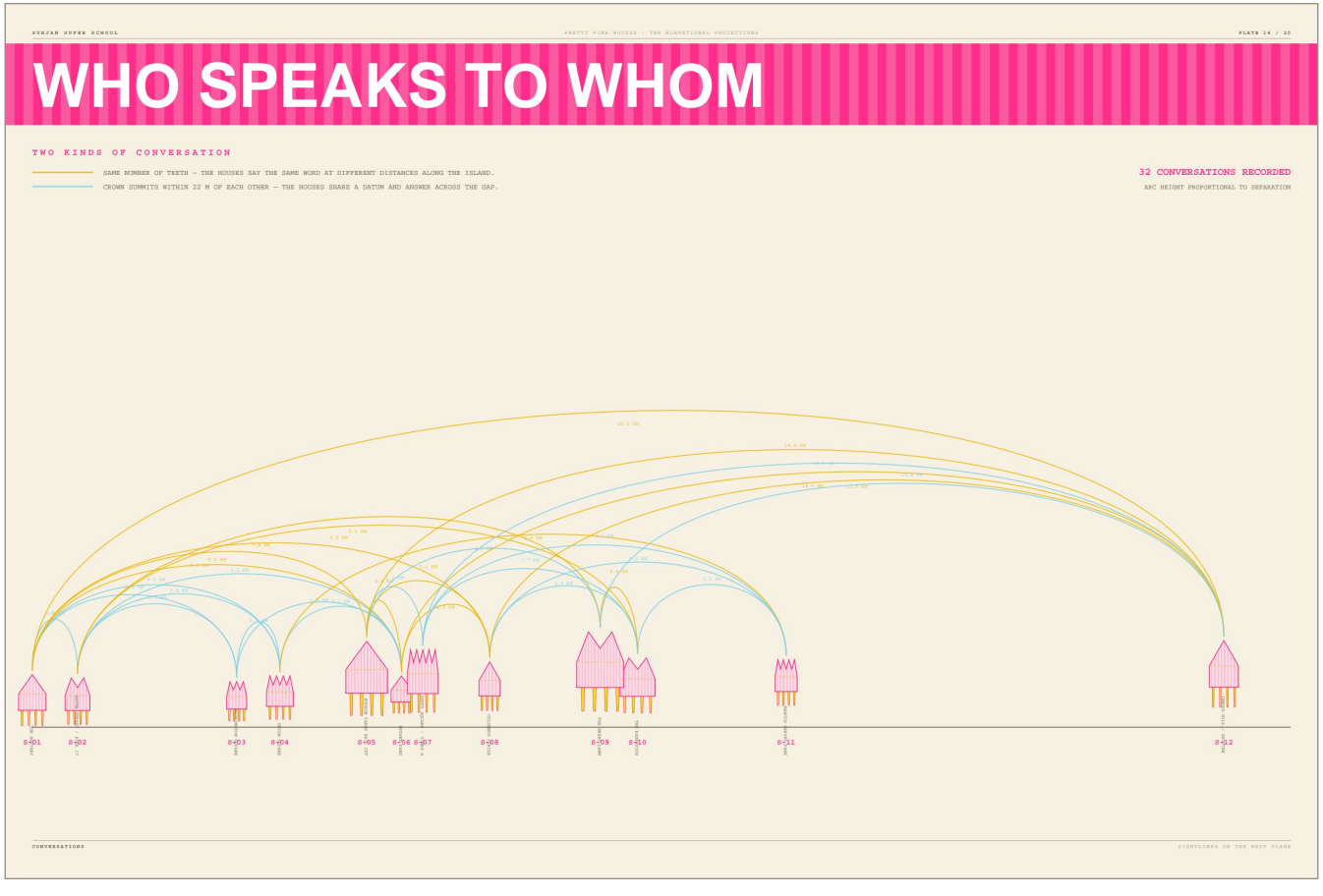
PART THREE

The Walks

Seeing is a thing you do from where you are standing. After a while that stops being enough.

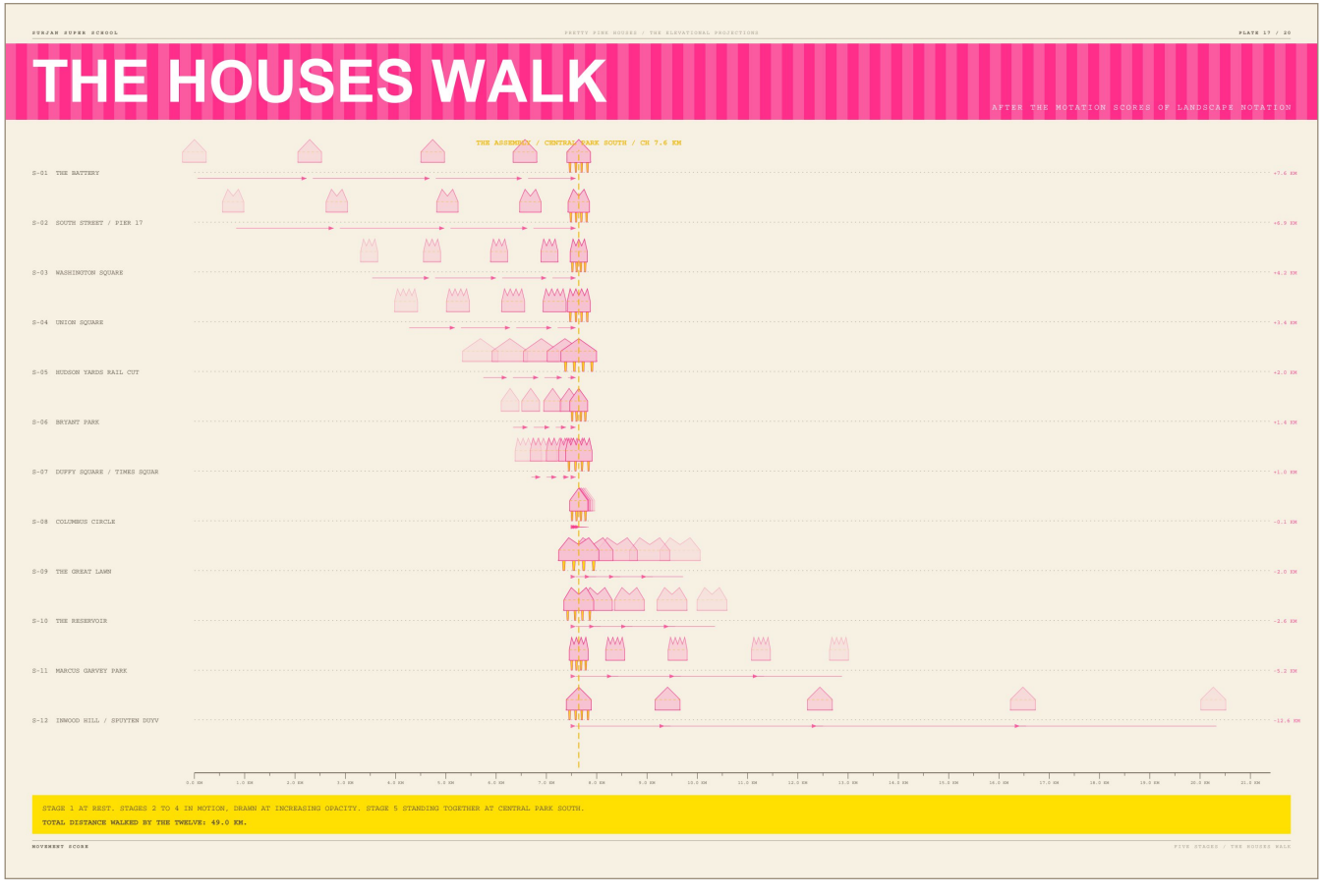
THE OBLIQUE VIEW: NETTIE IN HER NET, BIG SISTER OVER THE LAWN, WAVY IN HER FOUR SOFT TEETH

The oblique view: Nettie in her net, Big Sister over the Lawn, Wavy in her four soft teeth



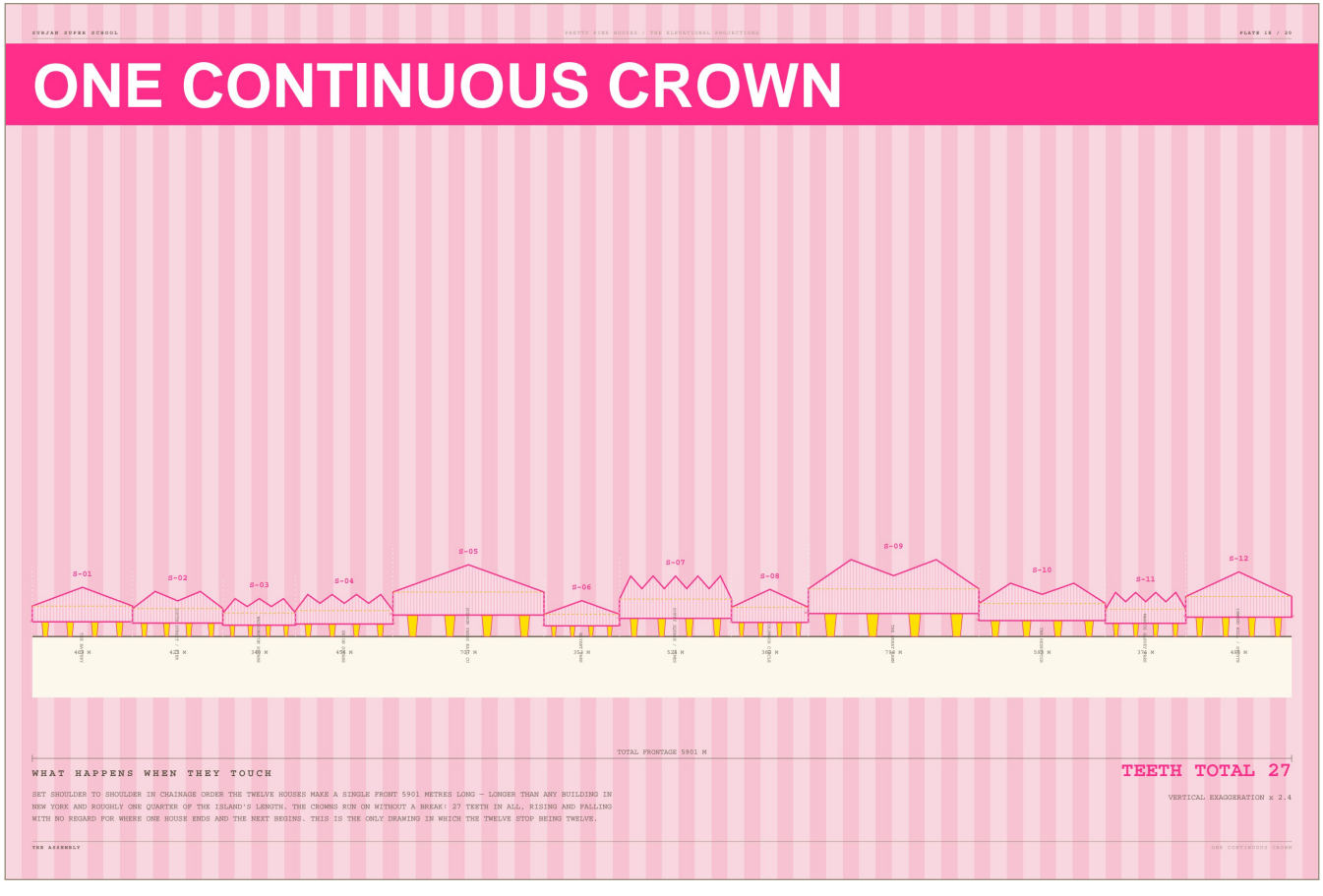
CONVERSATIONS: WHO COULD SPEAK TO WHOM

From The Elevational Projections, Volume Two


SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL
PRETTY PINK HOUSES / THE ELEVATIONAL PROJECTIONS
PLATE 17 / 20
THE HOUSES WALK
AFTER THE NOTATION SCORES OF LANDSCAPE NOTATION
THE ASSEMBLY / CENTRAL PARK SOUTH / CN 7.6 KM
S-01 THE BATTERY
S-02 SOUTH STREET / PIER 17
S-03 WASHINGTON SQUARE
S-04 UNION SQUARE
S-05 HUDSON YARDS RAIL CUT
S-06 BRYANT PARK
S-07 DUFFY SQUARE / TIMES SQUAR
S-08 COLUMBUS CIRCLE
S-09 THE GREAT LAWN
S-10 THE RESERVOIR
S-11 MARCUS GARVEY PARK
S-12 INWOOD HILL / SPUYTEN DUYV
STAGE 1 AT REST. STAGES 2 TO 4 IN MOTION, DRAWN AT INCREASING OPACITY. STAGE 5 STANDING TOGETHER AT CENTRAL PARK SOUTH.
TOTAL DISTANCE WALKED BY THE TWELVE: 49.0 KM.
MOVEMENT SCORE
FIVE STAGES / THE HOUSES WALK

THE MOVEMENT SCORE: FIVE STAGES OF THE WALK

From The Elevational Projections, Volume Two


SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL
PRETTY FINE HOUSES / THE ELEVATIONAL PROJECTIONS
PLATE 18 / 20
ONE CONTINUOUS CROWN
S-01
S-02
S-03
S-04
S-05
S-06
S-07
S-08
S-09
S-10
S-11
S-12
TOTAL FRONTAGE 5901 M
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THEY TOUCH
SET SHOULDER TO SHOULDER IN CHAINAGE ORDER THE TWELVE HOUSES MAKE A SINGLE FRONT 5901 METRES LONG — LONGER THAN ANY BUILDING IN NEW YORK AND ROUGHLY ONE QUARTER OF THE ISLAND'S LENGTH. THE CROWNS RUN ON WITHOUT A BREAK: 27 TEETH IN ALL, RISING AND FALLING WITH NO REGARD FOR WHERE ONE HOUSE ENDS AND THE NEXT BEGINS. THIS IS THE ONLY DRAWING IN WHICH THE TWELVE STOP BEING TWELVE.
TEETH TOTAL 27
VERTICAL EXAGGERATION x 2.4
THE ASSEMBLY
ONE CONTINUOUS CROWN

THE ASSEMBLY: ONE CONTINUOUS CROWN

From The Elevational Projections, Volume Two

The First Step

NKECHI ALVAREZ, ten, Hell's Kitchen

It was Pocket, again, first, again, and I have stopped being surprised by this. He is the one with nothing under him. He is the only one who has never had ground. If anybody was going to work out that legs are for something, it was going to be the one who has never been able to use them.

Nine days after the growing. Middle of the afternoon. Broad daylight. A Tuesday.

He took a step.

I want to describe it properly because the news got it wrong and the news has kept getting it wrong ever since.

He did not walk like a person. A person picks a foot up, swings it forward, puts it down, falls onto it. That is what walking is and it is a controlled fall and it requires you to be prepared to fall over, which a building four hundred metres wide is not.

He walked like a table walks when four people lift it.

He has eight legs. He picked up three of them, the ones on the northern side, very slowly, about as fast as a minute hand. He held them up. The whole thing tilted about as much as a plate tilts when you carry soup. Then he put them down, further north, one after another, and the last one settled and the concrete made a noise like a door closing in a very large house.

Then he did the other five.

He had moved about the length of one city block. It had taken nineteen minutes.

The trains kept running underneath the whole time. That is the detail that everybody leaves out and it is the only detail that matters. Not one train stopped. He picked his legs up over the tracks and put them down between them, and the 4:12 to Poughkeepsie went out under him at 4:12 exactly.

I ran the whole way from Tenth Avenue. I got there in time to see the last leg come down.

And I stood underneath him and I said, out loud, in the street, like a lunatic: where are you going.

And he did the thing that I now know all of them do, which is that he did not answer, because it was not a question with an answer. Where are you going is a grown-up question. It assumes there is a destination and that the point of moving is arriving.

What he did instead was he warmed one side.

North.

Which does not mean I am going north. It means: that way. It means: that is the interesting direction. It means: come on.

Walking Up Broadway

DESHAWN FERREIRA, twelve, Clinton

By the end of the first week all twelve had moved at least once and the city had lost its mind and then, in the way this city does, got completely used to it in about four days.

The rules of it, which nobody wrote down and everybody knew by the second week:

They only move in daylight. They have never moved in the dark. Not once. Ari thinks this is because they want to be seen doing it. Perpetua thinks it is because they do not want to frighten anybody. I think it is both and I think those are the same thing.

They never touch a building. Ever. Not once, not by accident, not in a wind. Eleven months and there is not a scratch on this city from any of them, and there are people whose entire job is now to check.

They go slowly enough to be got out of the way of, and they wait if anybody is slow. There is a woman on 42nd Street with a walking frame who has, on four separate occasions, been waited for by a nine-hundred-metre building. She says she has stopped apologising for it.

And they walk up Broadway.

Not always. But Broadway is the one they use, and Broadway is the old one, the crooked one, the one that was a path before it was a street, the only line in the whole grid that does not obey the grid. It goes diagonally across

everything. It is the one road on this island that was made by walking.

So of course. Of course that is the one they use.

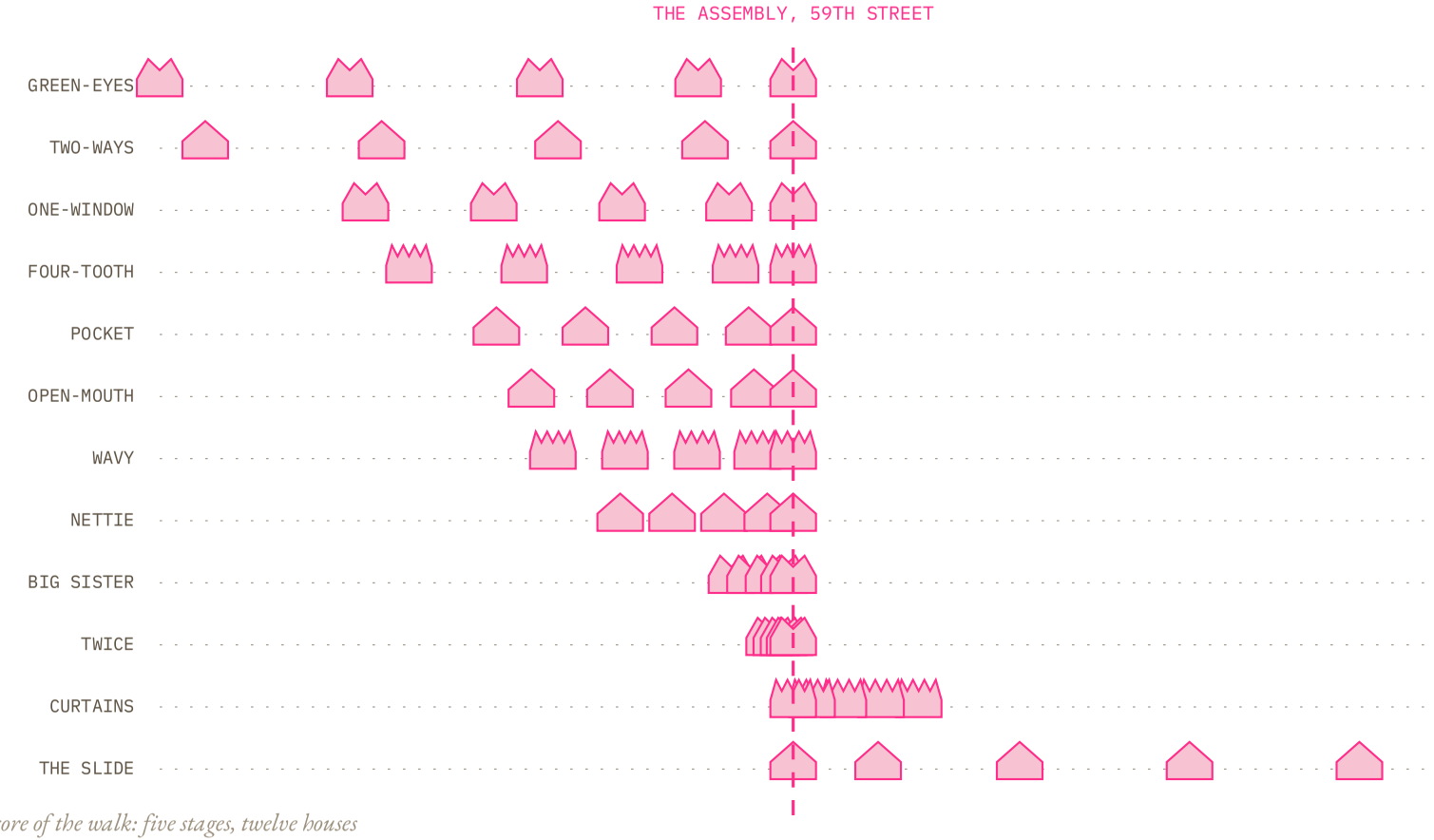
I have seen four of them do it. The best was Wavy, mine, in October, going south from Times Square to Union Square, which took her two days.

She has four rounded teeth and three yellow columns that flare out at the top like mushrooms, and she came down Broadway at the speed of a slow conversation, and the whole avenue filled up with people walking alongside her at exactly her pace, thousands of them, and nobody organised it and there were no banners and it was not a protest and it was not a parade.

It was an escort.

That is the only word for it. This city had decided to walk with her, and it walked with her all the way to 14th Street, and at 14th Street she stopped for the night and everybody went home and came back in the morning and did it again.

THE SCORE OF THE WALK



The score of the walk: five stages, twelve houses

The Crossing at Canal Street

TOMÁS REYES, seven, Two Bridges

Two-Ways is the one who crossed at Canal Street and I was there and I was seven.

Canal Street is where the island is narrowest. If you are a house and you want to get from the East River side to the Hudson side you go at Canal, because everywhere else you would have to walk over more city than you want to walk over.

He went in the morning. Nine o'clock. The whole of Canal Street had been closed since seven, which was the first time the city had officially closed a street for a house and which caused a fantastic argument in the newspapers that I did not read.

He went across in eleven steps. I counted. The X-brace under him swung very slightly with each one, like the pendulum in my great-aunt's clock, and it hummed the whole time, the second-lowest string, all the way across.

Halfway over he stopped.

Everybody thought something was wrong. There was a noise from the crowd, that noise a crowd makes.

He had stopped because there was a woman at a fruit stall who had not moved her fruit stall.

She had not moved it because it was her fruit stall and she had been there since half past four in the morning and she had said, to a policeman, on

television, a sentence that is now on a T-shirt: it can go round.

And it went round.

A building four hundred metres wide adjusted its course by about twenty metres to go round a fruit stall on Canal Street, and it took him three extra steps and eleven extra minutes, and when he had finished going round he stopped again and warmed the whole south side, right over her stall, in October, for about a minute.

And she stood in it with her arms folded.

I was seven and I did not understand what I had seen until I was about ten. What I had seen was two things being stubborn at each other very politely, and both of them winning.

Wading the Harlem River

BENEDIKT KOWALCZYK, eleven, Inwood

The Slide went into the water in November and this is the only chapter that is properly frightening and I am going to tell it straight.

The Harlem River is not wide. At the top of the island it is a narrow tidal strait with fast water and bridges over it every half mile. The Slide is one long rake, the simplest of all of them, no crown, no teeth, just a slope, and she stands on a bundle of yellow columns all clustered together like celery.

She wanted to go to the Bronx.

I know she wanted to go to the Bronx because she stood at the top of the island facing north-east for four days and did the warm thing on that side the entire time, which after a year of this you learn to read, and which meant, unmistakably: over there. What about over there. Has anybody been over there.

And the answer was no. None of them had ever left. Twelve houses, an island, and not one of them had ever crossed the water.

On the fifth day she went to the edge.

There was a crowd, obviously, because by November there was always a crowd. And the crowd was doing something I had not seen it do before, which was that it was completely silent. Thousands of people at the top of Manhattan in the cold not saying anything.

She put one leg in.

The water went white around it and the whole crowd made the noise.

She stood like that, one leg in, for about twenty minutes. Tide going out. The leg not moving. And I understood, standing there, freezing, that she was feeling for the bottom, and that she did not know if there was one, and that nobody could tell her.

And then she took the leg out.

She took it out and she put it back where it had been and she turned herself very slowly, the way they turn, which is a whole afternoon's work, until she was facing back down the island.

And everybody thought she had lost her nerve, and one newspaper actually printed that, and I want to say here in a book that will last longer than that newspaper: she had not.

She had worked out that if she went she could not come back. The tide was going out. She could feel the bottom going away.

And down the island, ten miles south, at the very bottom, standing over the harbour on four yellow legs, was Green-Eyes, who she had spent a year not being able to see and had now been able to see for four months.

She chose the family.

I asked her about it afterwards, in the spring, when I was braver. I said, do you still want to go to the Bronx.

And she did the warm thing on the north-east side, which meant yes.

And then she did it on the south side too, at the same time, both at once, which I had never seen and which took me a long time to work out, and which I eventually decided means: yes, and I am not sad, and those are both true, and you are eleven and you should go and get your dinner.

Stepping Over Central Park

WINNIE CASTELLANOS, eight, Yorkville

Big Sister does not walk very much. She is the largest and it costs her the most and mostly she stays where she is on the Great Lawn and lets everybody come to her, which some of the others find annoying and which Wavy has made remarks about.

But she went over the park once, east to west, in the first week of December, and it is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen and I am including things I have seen since, on purpose, having thought about it.

It had snowed the night before. Not a lot. Enough.

She has eight legs and she is two kilometres wide, so when she picks up her legs there is nothing underneath her at all, and the park was empty and white and had that blue in it that snow has in the morning.

She went across the park without putting a single leg on the park.

I have to explain this properly. She did not step over the park in one go, that is impossible, she is not a giant in a story. What she did was she put her legs on the streets. On the Transverse roads, which cut through the park east to west and which are lower than the park and which nobody walks on. She walked on the roads. Eight legs, two roads, moving one at a time, twenty-two minutes a step, for four hours, from Fifth Avenue to Central Park West.

Not one leg touched the grass. Not one leg touched the snow. Not one

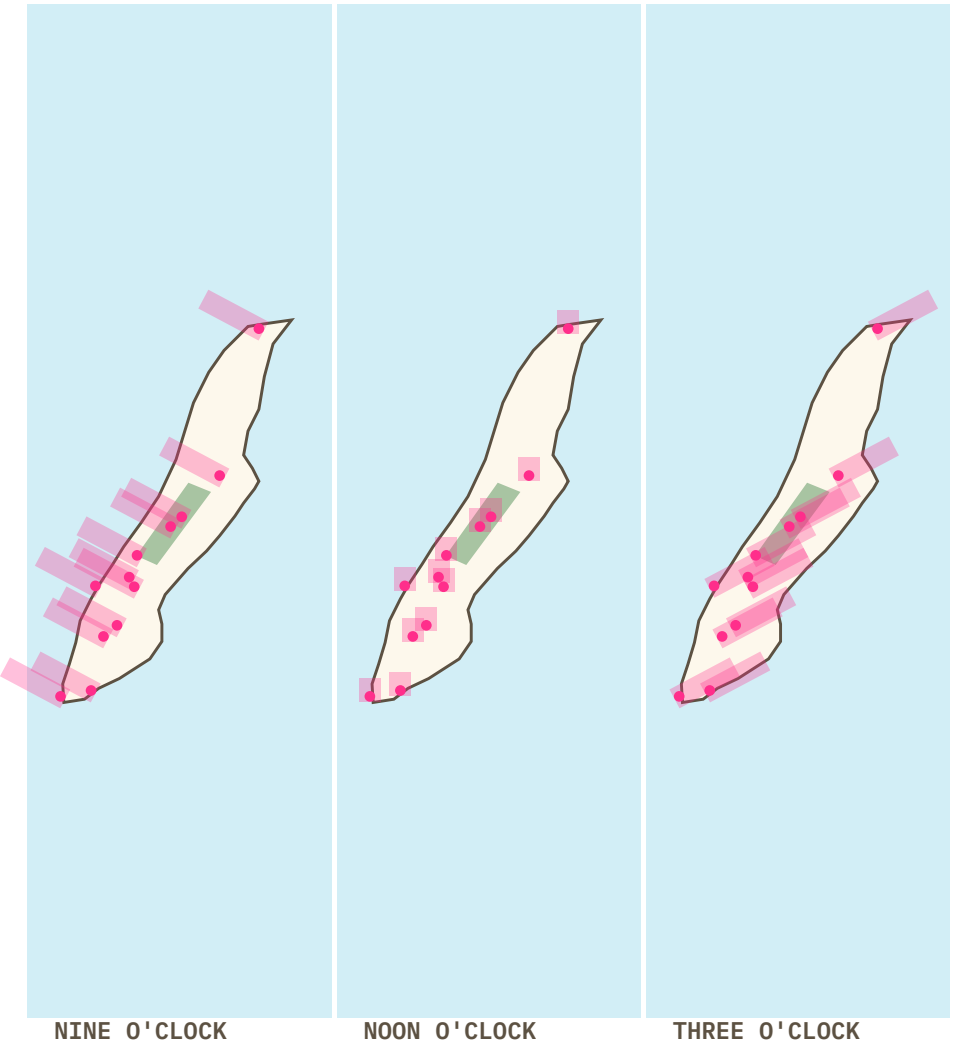
branch of one tree was broken and I have checked, and the Parks Department has checked, and there is a report.

And when she got to the west side she stopped and she stood there and the sun came round the top of the buildings on Central Park West at about eleven and went straight down the valley between her two points, and the beam of it came out the other side and lay across the whole white park from west to east like something spilt.

Everybody in the park lay down in it. Everybody. Old men. A wedding party. Nine hundred schoolchildren. Everybody lay down in the snow in the stripe of light and made angels, and got soaked, and went home wet and delighted, and the newspapers said it was mass hysteria, and it was not, it was a Wednesday.

THE SHADOW GAME

You start at a place. You must get to another place. You may only walk in shadow.



The shadow game: nine in the morning, noon, three in the afternoon

The Shadow Game

ARI GEDALIA, eight, Stuyvesant Town

This is my chapter because I invented the game, whatever Deshawn says, and there are witnesses.

When a house is nine hundred metres tall and the sun is low, its shadow is about four kilometres long. Four kilometres. From Union Square that is most of the way to the harbour.

So in the morning, when the sun is in the east, Four-Tooth's shadow lies right across downtown and out over the Hudson. And in the evening it goes the other way, across the East River, over Brooklyn.

Now. Twelve houses. Twelve shadows. Four kilometres each. Moving all day.

The game is this. You start at a place. You have to get to another place. You may only walk in shadow.

That is it. That is the whole game. It sounds easy and it is the best game there has ever been.

Because the shadows move. They swing round all day like the hands of a clock, all twelve of them at once, at slightly different speeds because the houses are at slightly different places, and they overlap and they separate, and a route that works at ten past nine does not work at half past nine, and you have to think in four dimensions and run.

In August it is genuinely useful, which is how we got the grown-ups to

allow it. In August the shade is worth having. There are now people who do their whole commute this way and there is a website, which was made by an adult, and which we do not use, because the whole point is working it out yourself.

The record for the Battery to Inwood entirely in shadow is held by a girl called Amira who is not one of the twelve of us and who did it in four hours and fifty minutes, starting at 6:40 in the morning, and who had to stand completely still for eleven minutes at 116th Street waiting for Curtains' shadow to swing round and meet Twice's shadow, which they do once a day, for about ninety seconds, in a place where there is nothing else at all.

Amira says the eleven minutes of standing still was the best part.

I believe her.

The Day It Snowed Inside a House

JUNO PARK, six, Murray Hill

It snowed inside Open-Mouth in January and this is my chapter and it is very short.

She is split open at the top. The inside of the split is yellow. When it snows, the snow goes in.

So on the 19th of January it snowed for eleven hours and the snow went into her and collected in the split, all the way along, a long white stripe lying in a long yellow trough nine hundred metres up.

And when the sun came out the next day, the yellow underneath went through the white on top and the whole stripe went the colour of the inside of a lemon, glowing, at nine hundred metres, over Bryant Park, in January.

My mother came with me. She did not say it was physics.

We stood in the park with about four thousand other people, all of us with our heads back, in the cold.

And after a while I said, she has got snow in her mouth.

And a man next to me who I did not know said: she has, hasn't she.

And that was the whole conversation and I have thought about it for a long time. I think what happened is that we both said the true thing out loud in public in front of strangers and nobody laughed at either of us, and that this is not a small thing to happen to a person, and that it happened to me

when I was six, and that I have been slightly braver ever since.

Pocket Loses Something and the Whole Island Looks For It

NKECHI ALVAREZ, ten, Hell's Kitchen

In February Pocket lost the kite.

The kite had been in his concrete room since the ninth month, which was before the growing, so it had been in there a long time, and when he grew it grew too, which nobody can explain and which I have stopped trying to explain to people who want it explained.

He walked from the rail cut down to the Hudson piers on a Thursday. It was very windy. Somewhere between 30th Street and 23rd Street the kite went.

Now Pocket cannot look for anything. He is a building. He cannot bend down.

What he did instead was he stopped where he was, in the middle of a walk, which none of them had ever done, and he stood there, and he went cold on every side, which I had never seen, and which Perpetua later said is what a house does instead of crying, and I do not think she is wrong.

And then Wavy noticed, from Times Square, because now they can all see each other.

And Wavy did the thing with her four rounded teeth that means look at him, and Nettie saw Wavy, and Open-Mouth saw Nettie, and inside about

four minutes all eleven of the others were doing it, all up and down the island, and Twice was doing it in the water as well so it looked like there were thirteen.

And people noticed. Because by February people could read them. Not the way we can, but enough. Enough to know that something had gone wrong and that it was to do with the one at the piers.

And a woman on the Chelsea waterfront found a kite in a tree at four o'clock and did not throw it away.

And she asked somebody, and they asked somebody, and by six o'clock there were about two hundred people on the pier and somebody had got a cherry-picker from a film shoot, and at ten past seven at night in February a stranger in a hard hat put a kite into the concrete room of a nine-hundred-metre-tall building while everybody watched.

And Pocket went warm on all sides at once. All eight legs. Everything.

And every other house on the island did it too, at the same moment, the whole length of Manhattan going warm at ten past seven on a freezing Thursday, and the temperature in the streets under them went up by four degrees for about ninety seconds, and there is a paper about it, by a professor, with graphs, and it does not mention the kite.

The Long Way Round

PERPETUA LIN, eleven, MacDougal Street

One-Window went all the way round the island in the spring and did not tell anybody she was going.

She left Washington Square on the 3rd of April and she came back on the 2nd of May and in between she went down the east side, round the Battery, up the west side to Inwood, along the top, and back down the middle. Twenty-nine days. About forty miles.

She is the plainest of them. One square window. No yellow, no green, no net, no curtains. For a year I thought this meant she had less to say, and being wrong about that is one of the two or three most useful things that has happened to me.

She had a lot to say. She had, it turned out, been saving it.

I did not follow her the whole way because I am eleven and I have school. I saw her seven times. Here is one of them.

The 14th of April, Inwood, at the very top, where the Slide lives. It was raining. One-Window had come all the way up the west side and she stood next to the Slide at the top of the island for the whole of the 14th and the whole of the 15th and did not move, and the two of them made a sound together for two days.

Not a note. Both of them at once, slightly out of tune with each other, on purpose, so that the two sounds beat against each other and made a slow

throb, the way two strings do when you are tuning a guitar and you are nearly there.

Two days of not quite being in tune, on purpose, at the top of an island, in the rain.

Benedikt says that is what family sounds like and I told him that was very sentimental and I have since decided it is correct.

And when she came back to Washington Square on the 2nd of May she went straight back to exactly where she had been, to the centimetre, which the surveyors confirmed and which made two of them cry, and everything was exactly as it had been except that she had gone all the way round the world she lives in and come home.

I asked her what it was like.

And she did the thing with her one window. Just the one. Which is the only thing she has and which she uses for everything.

She let the light go through it and out the other side, so that a single square of daylight fell on the north side of the square, on the paving, about the size of a room.

Which I understood to mean: it is all like this. It is like this the whole way round. It is exactly this, everywhere, in different arrangements, for forty miles, without stopping.

From the Book of Not Being Bored

Third gathering

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118. They have walked one hundred and ninety-four miles between them since August. I have added it up four times. Nothing has been damaged. — MIRIAM

122. The city closed a street for a fruit stall. Everyone remembers that they closed it for a house. They closed it for a house and then the house closed itself for a fruit stall. — TOMÁS

129. There is a man who follows Wavy on a bicycle everywhere she goes and sells nothing and asks for nothing. He has been doing it since October. Somebody asked him why and he said: I have never been part of anything. — DESHAWN

134. Twice has not moved once. Not one step, in eight months. She is standing in the water and she can see everybody and she does not want to be anywhere else. Some people are like that too and everybody keeps telling them they are wrong. — SOLOMON

141. I have stopped calling it magic. Magic is when you cannot see how it is done. I can see exactly how it is done, I have watched it for nine months, and it is still the most amazing thing I have ever seen, and that is much better than magic. — ARI

147. Grown-ups keep waiting for the disaster. — INÉS

148. There has not been a disaster. — INÉS

149. I think they will keep waiting even after we are old. — INÉS

153. Curtains has started opening her arches for other things. Not just for Twice. For a funeral on 120th Street. For the first day of school. She has become the sort of person who marks occasions. — ZAIRA

160. The fox has cubs. Four. Under the Slide, in the bank, on the north side, where it is dry because of the overhang. So the overhang is a house now. So the house has a house in it. — BENEDIKT

166. What I have learned this year: a thing is not finished when it is built. That is the middle. — PERPETUA

171. Nobody is bored. Nobody on this whole island has been bored since August. That will not last and it does not have to. — JUNO

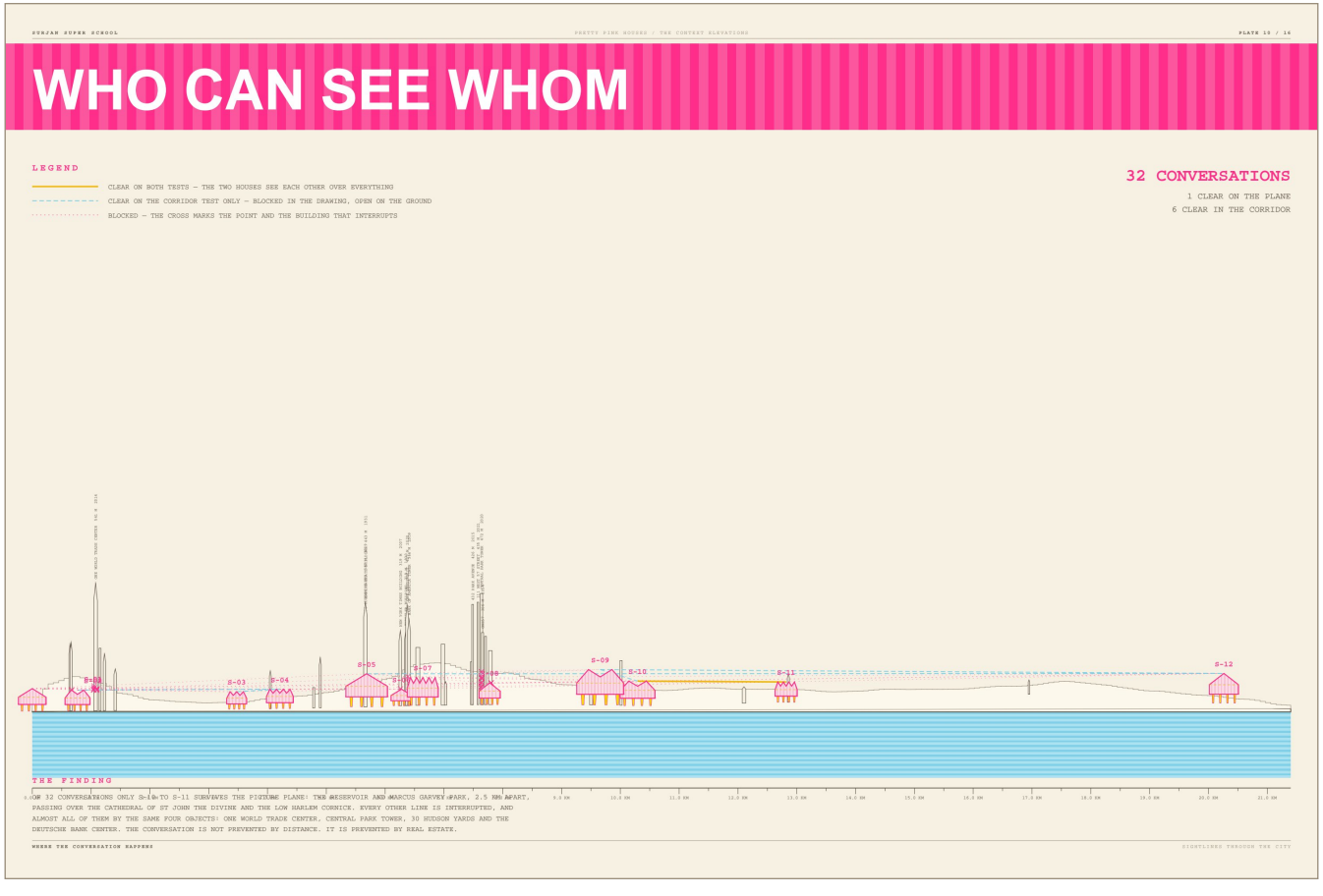
PART FOUR

The Assembly

What twelve things do when they finally decide to stand next to each other.

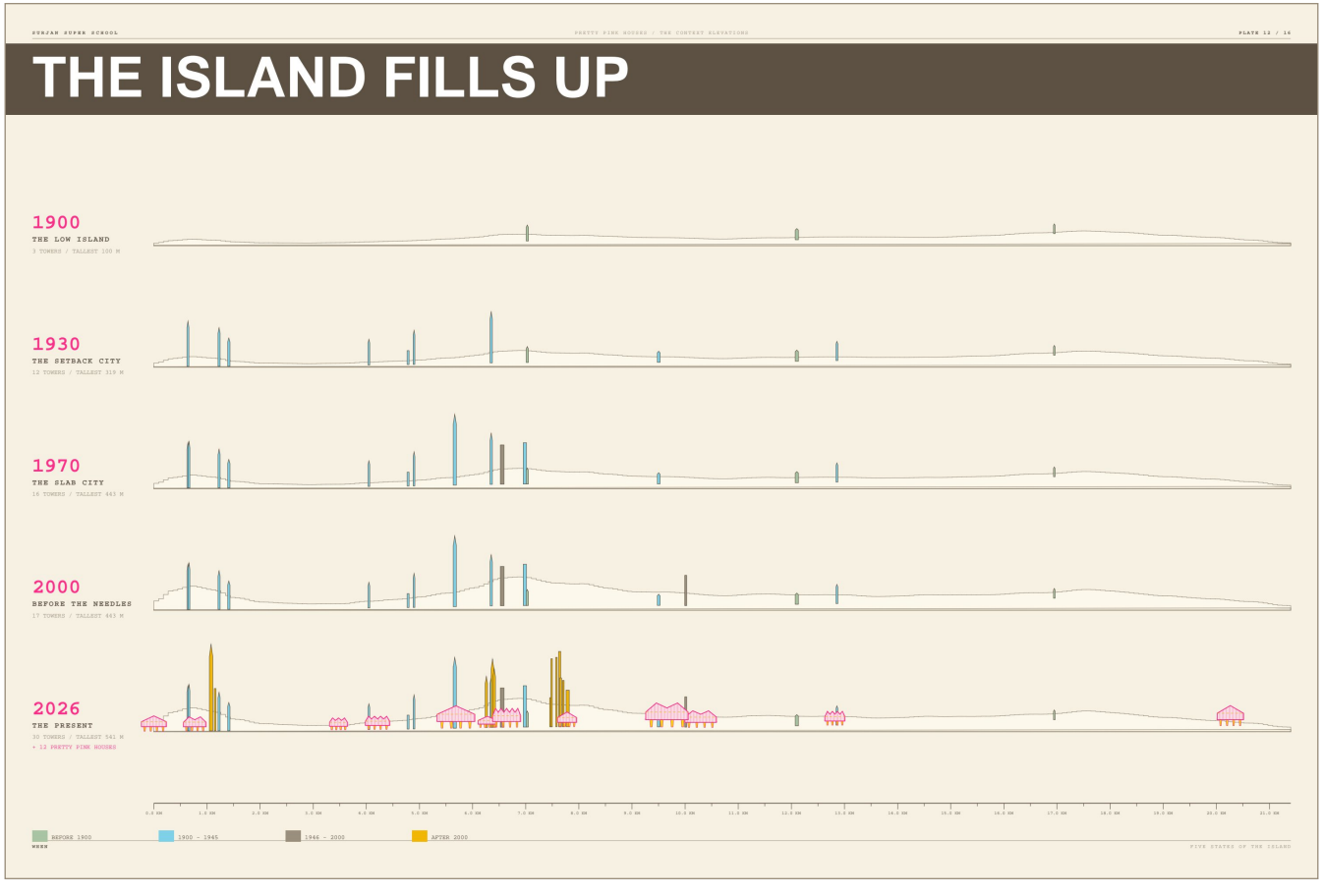
LOOKING STRAIGHT DOWN ON THE WALK, THE MORNING AFTER THE GROWING

Looking straight down on the walk, the morning after the growing


SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL
PRETTY PINK HOUSES / THE CONTEXT ELEVATIONS
PLATE 19 / 16
WHO CAN SEE WHOM
LEGEND
CLEAR ON BOTH TESTS — THE TWO HOUSES SEE EACH OTHER OVER EVERYTHING
CLEAR ON THE CORRIDOR TEST ONLY — BLOCKED IN THE DRAWING, OPEN ON THE GROUND
BLOCKED — THE CROSS MARKS THE POINT AND THE BUILDING THAT INTERRUPTS
32 CONVERSATIONS
1 CLEAR ON THE PLANE
6 CLEAR IN THE CORRIDOR
S-01
S-02
S-03
S-04
S-05
S-06
S-07
S-08
S-09
S-10
S-11
S-12
THE FINDING
OF 32 CONVERSATIONS ONLY S-10 TO S-11 SURVIVES THE PICTURE PLANE: THE RESERVOIR AND MARCUS GARVEY PARK, 2.5 KM APART, PASSING OVER THE CATHEDRAL OF ST JOHN THE DIVINE AND THE LOW HARLEM CORNICE. EVERY OTHER LINK IS INTERRUPTED, AND ALMOST ALL OF THEM BY THE SAME FOUR OBJECTS: ONE WORLD TRADE CENTER, CENTRAL PARK TOWER, 30 HUDSON YARDS AND THE DEUTSCHE BANK CENTER. THE CONVERSATION IS NOT PREVENTED BY DISTANCE. IT IS PREVENTED BY REAL ESTATE.
WHERE THE CONVERSATION HAPPENS
SIGHTLINES THROUGH THE CITY

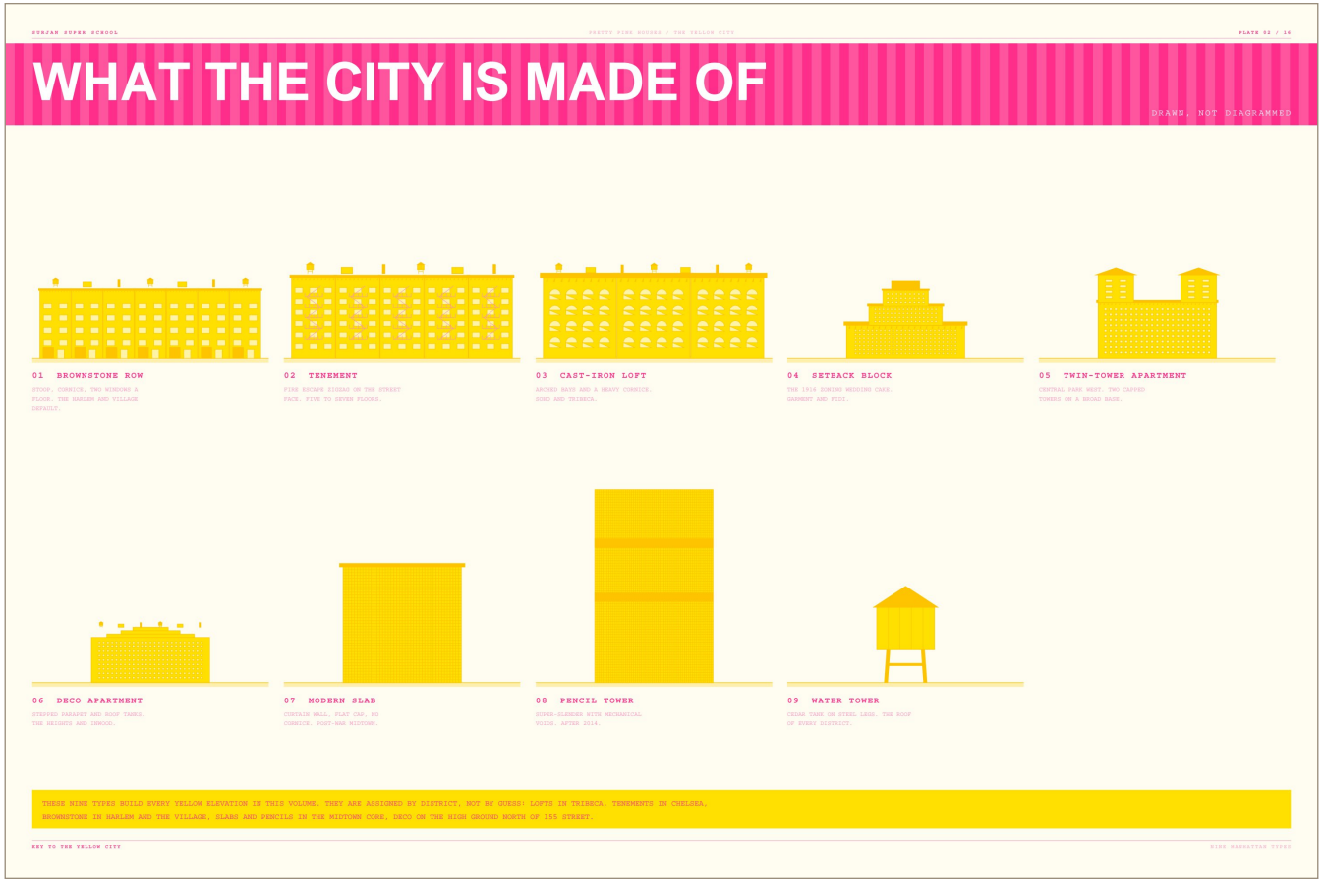
WHERE THE CONVERSATION HAPPENS: SIGHTLINES THROUGH THE CITY

From The Context Elevations, Volume Three



WHEN: FIVE STATES OF THE ISLAND AS IT FILLED UP

From The Context Elevations, Volume Three


SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL
PRETTY PINK HOUSES / THE YELLOW CITY
PLATE 02 / 16
WHAT THE CITY IS MADE OF
DRAWN, NOT DIAGRAMMED
01 BROWNSTONE ROW
STOOP, CORNICE, TWO WINDOWS A FLOOR. THE HARLEM AND VILLAGE DEFAULT.
02 TENEMENT
FIRE ESCAPES RIDING ON THE STREET FACE. FIVE TO SEVEN FLOORS.
03 CAST-IRON LOFT
ARCHED BAYS AND A HEAVY CORNICE. SOHO AND TRIBECA.
04 SETBACK BLOCK
THE 1916 ZONING WEDDING CAKE. GARMENT AND FIDI.
05 TWIN-TOWER APARTMENT
CENTRAL PARK WEST. TWO CAPPED TOWERS ON A BROAD BASE.
06 DECO APARTMENT
STEPPED PARAPET AND ROOF TANKS. THE HEIGHTS AND INWOOD.
07 MODERN SLAB
CURTAIN WALL, FLAT CAP, NO CORNICE. POST-WAR MIDTOWN.
08 PENCIL TOWER
SUPER-SLENDER WITH MECHANICAL VOIDS. AFTER 2014.
09 WATER TOWER
CEDAR TANK ON STEEL LEGS. THE ROOF OF EVERY DISTRICT.
THESE NINE TYPES BUILD EVERY YELLOW ELEVATION IN THIS VOLUME. THEY ARE ASSIGNED BY DISTRICT, NOT BY GUESS: LOFTS IN TRIBECA, TENEMENTS IN CHELSEA, BROWNSTONE IN HARLEM AND THE VILLAGE, SLABS AND PENCILS IN THE MIDTOWN CORE, DECO ON THE HIGH GROUND NORTH OF 155 STREET.
KEY TO THE YELLOW CITY
NINE MANHATTAN TYPES

KEY TO THE YELLOW CITY: NINE MANHATTAN TYPES

From The Yellow City, Volume Four

The Invitation, Written in Windows

MIRIAM ASHRAF, nine, Lincoln Square

Nobody sent the invitation. That is the thing everybody gets wrong.

There was no announcement, no date, no organiser, and this drove the city completely mad, because a city can cope with anything except not knowing who is in charge.

What happened was that on the 11th of May, at about half past six in the evening, Nettie put her lights on in a pattern.

She has a white net of triangles over her front and behind the net she has panels, and some of the panels are glass, and the glass ones can be lit or not lit. There are hundreds of them. For nine months she had lit them all together or not at all, like a normal building.

On the 11th of May she lit eleven.

Eleven, out of hundreds, in a shape.

I was on my roof, which is where I always am, and I saw it and I did not understand it and I drew it, which is what I do when I do not understand something.

And what I had drawn was the island.

Not a picture of the island. A diagram of it. Eleven lights in the position of eleven houses, seen from above, with the twelfth position — hers — dark, because she was standing in it.

And then, after about four minutes, one of the eleven lights went out. And

then it came on again in a different place, a bit further along, closer to the middle of the island.

And then another one moved. And another.

She was showing them where to come.

Over the next hour she moved all eleven lights, one at a time, slowly enough for anybody watching to follow, until all eleven were in a row across the middle of the island, at the bottom edge of the park, at 59th Street.

And then she lit her own panel too, and put it at the end of the row, and left all twelve on, and did not change them again for six days.

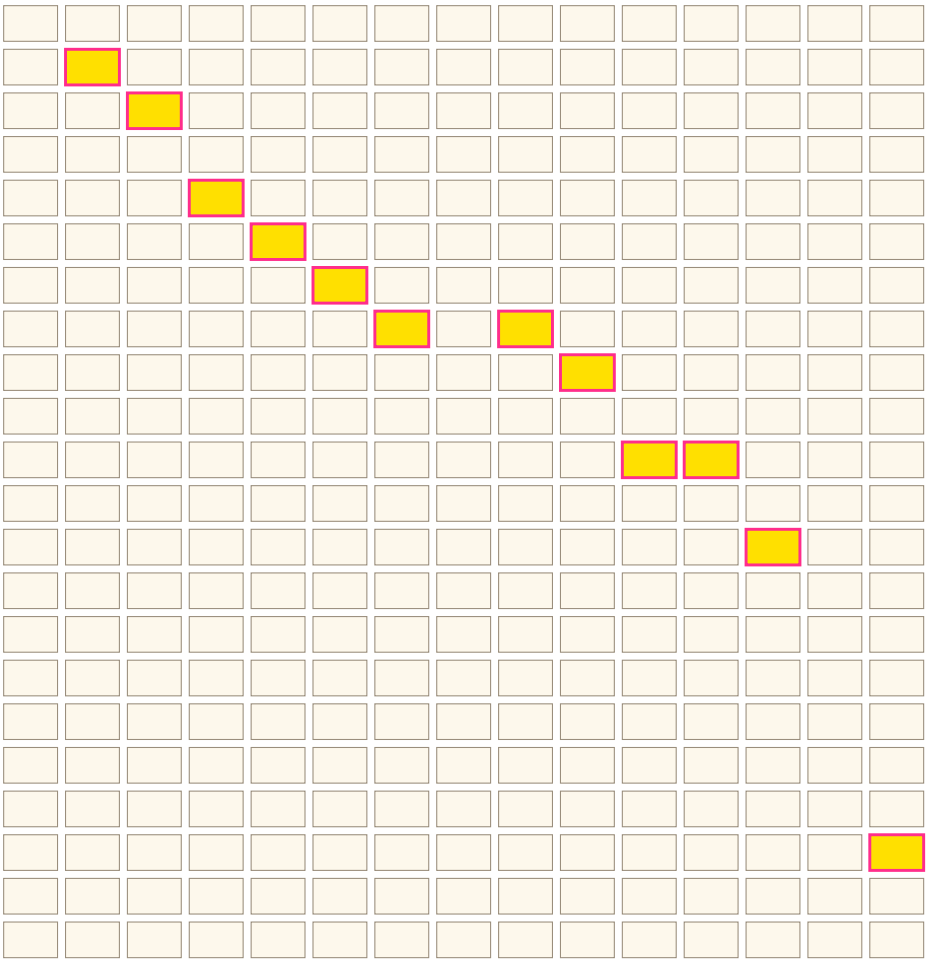
That was the invitation. It said: here, and it said: all of us, and it did not say when, because they do not have when, they have soon.

The newspapers spent two days deciding it was an art installation.

I was nine and I had a drawing of it and I knew what it was, and so did the other eleven of us, and so, by the end of the week, did about a hundred thousand other people, because Deshawn put my drawing on the internet with three words under it, and the three words were: they are gathering.

THE INVITATION, WRITTEN IN WINDOWS

Nettie lit eleven panels out of hundreds, in the shape of the island, and then moved them.



The invitation, written in windows, 11 May

They Come from Every End of the Island

Assembled from all twelve notebooks

It took eleven days.

They came at the speed they go, which is the speed of a slow walk, and they came along the routes they use, and by the fourth day the whole city had rearranged itself around the watching of it. Schools moved their timetables. The transit authority put out a map. A newspaper printed a chart every morning showing where each of them had got to, like a weather chart, and the chart was on the front page for nine days running.

GREEN-EYES came the furthest of the southern ones, up from the Battery, up Broadway, past the Woolworth Building and the courthouses, through SoHo. She took her time. She stopped for a day at Canal Street, at the narrow part, in exactly the place Two-Ways had crossed in the autumn, and stood there, and nobody knows why, and Inés thinks she was paying a call.

TWO-WAYS came up along the east side, over the old fish market and past the bridges, humming the whole way. His X-brace swung. Four hundred thousand people photographed it.

ONE-WINDOW had the shortest walk of any of them and left last, which Perpetua says is exactly like her.

FOUR-TOOTH came up Broadway from Union Square and got tangled — not physically, nothing touched — in the Flatiron, in the sense that the

streets there do not agree with each other and he had to go round three times before he found a way through, and there is film of it, and it is very funny, and Ari finds it deeply humiliating and will not watch it.

POCKET came across from the rail cut with his two rooms swinging gently under him and the kite in the concrete one.

OPEN-MOUTH went four blocks. She had the shortest distance of anybody after One-Window and she still took two days, and she arrived with the whole of the north side of Bryant Park walking behind her, and Juno at the front, aged six, holding her mother's hand and absolutely furious about it.

WAVY came down from Duffy Square with the man on the bicycle following her and about eleven thousand other people, and Times Square was, for the first time in a hundred years, quieter after she left than before.

NETTIE went one block. She had called them. She got there first and waited nine days, which the children agree was the most gracious thing any of them did.

BIG SISTER came down the length of the park on the Transverse roads, again, exactly as before, not touching the grass, taking six days to go two miles, and every day about a quarter of a million people came to walk beside her.

TWICE moved. For the first time in eleven months, Twice took her legs out of the water. Solomon says he does not want to talk about it and then talks about it for two pages. She came down the west side of the park and left four enormous holes in the Reservoir which filled in by evening. The last thing she did before she came down was to look north, at Curtains, for a long time.

CURTAINS came down from Marcus Garvey Park with all four arches open the entire way, which meant that for three days a moving column of light went down Central Park West at four in the afternoon.

And THE SLIDE came from the very top. Ten miles. Longer than anybody. She left on the first day and arrived on the eleventh, one long pink rake coming slowly down the length of the island like a hand

lowering, and at the top of the island she left behind a fox and four cubs in a dry bank under an overhang that was not there any more, and Benedikt, who is eleven and does not cry, has written half a page about the fox and no words at all about the house.

Shoulder to Shoulder at Central Park South

WINNIE CASTELLANOS, eight, Yorkville

They arranged themselves in the order they stand on the island. Bottom of the island on the left, top of the island on the right. Nobody told them to. It is just the order they were in.

Green-Eyes, Two-Ways, One-Window, Four-Tooth, Pocket, Open-Mouth, Wavy, Nettie, Big Sister, Twice, Curtains, the Slide.

And they stood shoulder to shoulder along the southern edge of Central Park, across the whole width of the island and then some, out over both rivers at the ends.

Fourteen and a half kilometres of pink.

Not touching. That is important and it took the surveyors three days to confirm and it made the front pages when they did: not one of them was touching another one. Between every pair there was a gap of about two metres. Twelve houses, eleven gaps, every gap the same, and nobody had measured anything.

If you stood underneath, at street level, on 59th Street, and looked up, the crowns went along above you and did not stop. Sharp points, then rounded ones, then a long slide, then two enormous points, then a split with yellow inside, then a white net, then more points, going on and on to the left and to the right until the haze took them.

Twenty-seven teeth in a row, all different sizes, with no break.

You could not see where one house ended and the next began unless you knew, and I knew, and I still could not always tell.

That is what everybody came for and that is what all the pictures are of. But it is not what I remember.

What I remember is that at about six in the evening on the second day, the wind came from the west, off the Hudson, straight down the line.

And it went through all twelve of them at once.

Every crown. Every valley. Every rib. Fourteen and a half kilometres of pink metal in one wind.

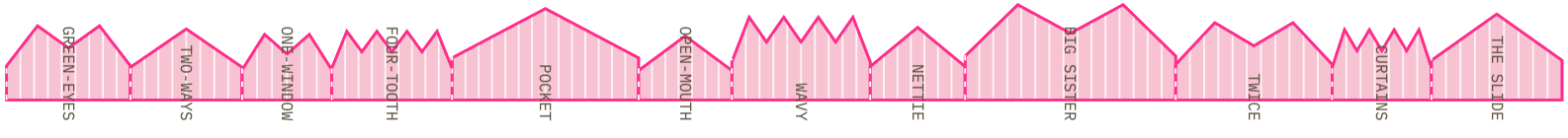
And it made a sound that filled the whole island, from the harbour to the Bronx, and out over the water to New Jersey and to Queens, and people heard it in Staten Island.

It was one sound. Twelve houses and it was one sound. Not twelve notes together, which is what I expected. One.

And I was standing on 59th Street in the middle of about half a million people and everybody had stopped talking at exactly the same moment, the way a room does, and I understood, at eight years old, standing in a crowd, that I would be describing this for the rest of my life and would never once get it right.

THE ASSEMBLY

Shoulder to shoulder along the southern edge of the park, not one of them touching another.



FOURTEEN AND A HALF KILOMETRES, TWENTY-SEVEN TEETH, ELEVEN GAPS OF TWO METRES

The Assembly: twenty-seven teeth, fourteen kilometres, no break

One Crown, Fourteen Kilometres

SOLOMON ADEYEMI, ten, Manhattan Valley

I want to write down the argument about whether they had become one house, because it was a real argument and it went on for weeks and it is the only thing the twelve of us have never agreed about.

DESHAWN said yes. He said: look at it. One crown, no gaps you can see, one sound. That is one thing.

PERPETUA said no. She said: two metres is a gap. A gap is a gap. You do not become one thing by standing close to something. If you did, this whole city would be one building.

ARI said it depends what you measure, which is what Ari always says and which is why we make him do the maths.

MIRIAM said the important thing is that they chose the gap. She pointed out that the gaps were all the same and that nobody had measured anything, and that if twelve enormous things arrange themselves two metres apart without discussing it, then two metres means something, and what it means is: I am next to you and I am still me.

And that is the answer and everybody knows it is the answer and Deshawn still argues about it because he enjoys arguing.

I have my own answer and it is not architectural.

My grandfather died in the winter before all this. I have written it down once already in this book, on the day we made the naming rules, and

Perpetua asked me if I wanted it taken out and I said no.

Here is the thing about grief that nobody tells you when you are ten: everybody wants you to close the gap. Everybody wants you to be all right, which means they want the space where the person was to stop being a space. They want you to fill it in.

And you cannot fill it in. And you should not. The space where he was is the shape of him. It is the last thing of him that is still the right size.

Twelve houses stood shoulder to shoulder along the edge of a park with eleven gaps between them, every gap exactly the same, and they did not close them, and they were not less together for it, and the wind went through the gaps and that is what made the sound.

The sound came from the gaps.

If they had closed up there would have been no sound at all.

The Song With Twenty-Seven Teeth

ZAIRA MENDES, seven, Harlem

There was drumming on the third night.

It started in Harlem because everything starts in Harlem, and it came down on the trains and on foot, and by eleven o'clock at night on the 24th of May there were, according to a count nobody trusts, one hundred and forty thousand people on and around 59th Street with something to hit.

Buckets. Real drums. Car bonnets. A woman with two saucepans who was on the news. My aunt with the cooking pot she will not let anybody use for cooking.

And here is what happened, and this is the part I have to get right.

The houses joined in.

Not by making a noise. They cannot make a noise on purpose, they can only change what the wind and the light are doing, that is the whole grammar of them, Perpetua worked it out in the first month.

What they did was they opened and closed.

Curtains has four arches with curtains. Nettie has hundreds of glass panels behind her net. Open-Mouth has a mouth. Green-Eyes has three tall green windows. One-Window has one.

And on the third night, in time with a hundred and forty thousand people, twelve houses opened and shut their windows.

The light went on and off, all along fourteen kilometres, on the beat.

Not all at once. In a pattern, running from the left end to the right end and back, so that the light went down the line and came back, over and over, at the speed the drumming was going, for four and a half hours.

Somebody worked out afterwards that the pattern was in twenty-seven. Twenty-seven beats, then round again. There are twenty-seven teeth in the assembled crown.

They were drumming their own shape.

I was seven and I was allowed to stay up because my mother is my mother, and I was on my aunt's shoulders at half past one in the morning in a crowd of a hundred and forty thousand people at the bottom of Central Park, and the whole southern sky was pink and flashing in twenty-seven, and every single person I could see was laughing.

Not smiling. Laughing. It is different. You can hear it in the recordings.

What the City Did

DESHAWN FERREIRA, twelve, Clinton

I am putting this chapter in because somebody has to and because the other eleven all wanted to skip it and go straight to the going home.

The city had to decide what to do.

There were eleven months of arguing and it was mostly stupid and I am not going to write it all down. Here are the four positions, which is all anybody actually said, in various expensive ways:

ONE. They are a hazard and they must go.

TWO. They are an asset and they must be taxed.

THREE. They are art and they must be protected.

FOUR. They are none of our business and we should leave them alone.

I want to record that position FOUR was in a clear minority for the whole of the first year and then, some time in the second summer, without any single moment you can point at, became the position of nearly everybody, and that nobody has ever admitted changing their mind.

Here is what actually happened, in order.

The transit authority published a walking schedule, because they had to, because trains. It was accurate to within eleven minutes and it was the best-selling map in the history of this city.

The Parks Department reported that the grass under the shadows was healthier, not worse, because it was not being baked. This report was

ignored by everybody who had already decided.

An insurance company calculated the damage caused by the houses over fourteen months at a total of nine hundred dollars, all of it one bollard on West Street, and then went quiet.

Somebody counted how many people went outside. Everyone had gone outside. Everyone in the city was outdoors all the time. The parks were full at seven in the morning. The waterfront was full at eleven at night. Nobody could work out how to make money from this and it made a certain kind of person genuinely angry.

Three cities wrote asking how to get one. There is no answer to that letter and the city has never sent one.

And the mayor, who I will not name because he does not deserve it, went on the radio in the second August and was asked what the houses were for, and said, and I quote, because I had the tape recorder: I don't know. I've stopped asking. My daughter's nine and she gets up early now.

That is the only sentence any adult said in two years that any of the twelve of us wrote down.

An Apocryphal Chapter, Rejected by All Twelve Children

Included by Surjan over their objection

There exists a thirteenth notebook.

It is not in a child's hand. It was left on the steps of the library on 42nd Street in a plastic bag in October of the second year, addressed to no one, and it contains forty-one pages describing a thirteenth house.

The thirteenth house, according to the notebook, stands at the exact centre of the island, is entirely invisible, has no legs, casts no shadow, and is the only one of them that can hear the others when they are not speaking. It is described as being made of the same pink as the others but of a pink that does not reflect any light, so that it can only be located by the small, precise absence it makes in the weather.

The children read it. All twelve of them, in one afternoon, passing it round.

Then they voted, which they had only done twice before, and they voted eleven to one to keep it out of this book.

Perpetua wrote the reason on the back of the last page and I reproduce it exactly:

It is very good and somebody clever wrote it and that is what is wrong with it.

Ours are all findable. You can go and stand under any of ours.

A house you cannot go and stand under is not a house, it is an idea about a house,

and an idea about a house is what people have instead of a house.

Also it is sad, and it is sad on purpose, and being sad on purpose is a grown-up hobby.

The one dissenting vote was Solomon's. He has never explained it and has been asked many times. When I asked him, at fifteen, he said only: I liked that it was listening.

I have included the chapter, against the wishes of eleven children and with the reluctant permission of the twelfth, because a book about twelve houses ought to contain the one that isn't there, and because Perpetua's paragraph is the best piece of criticism written this century, and it needed something to be about.

The Argument, and How It Ended in Laughing

INÉS OKONKWO, nine, Battery Park City

On the ninth day of the Assembly the houses had a disagreement and it is the only one they have ever had.

I do not know what it was about. None of us do. Perpetua has a theory and Ari has a different theory and both theories are eleven pages long and neither of them is in this book.

What we know is what happened, which is this.

At about two in the afternoon on the ninth day, Wavy moved out of line. About forty metres forward, out of the row, onto the park side, and turned herself so that she was facing the others instead of standing with them.

Nobody had ever broken the row.

The city noticed within about four minutes. The helicopters were up. Somebody on the radio said the word "incident" nine times in a minute.

And the eleven others did absolutely nothing for two hours.

They did not follow her. They did not turn. They did not warm, or cool, or light anything, or open anything. Eleven houses stood in a row for two hours doing nothing at all while the twelfth stood out in front of them facing the wrong way.

At about four o'clock Open-Mouth laughed.

She did the eleven o'clock thing. The sun was in the west by then so it should not have worked at all, and it did not work properly, the yellow

only caught the very top of the split — but it caught it, and a thin line of peach-coloured light came down onto the park, wrong-angled, four hours late, absolutely useless.

She did it badly. On purpose. In the middle of a two-hour silence.

And Wavy's four rounded teeth did the thing they do, which is nothing you can photograph, and the whole line went warm, all twelve at once, including the one that was out of place.

And she came back into line over the next hour, forty metres, no fuss.

And that is the entire argument and the entire resolution and nobody has ever known what it was about, and the twelve of us have decided that this is right and proper, because it was theirs, and because you do not get to know everything about people you love, and because the ones who tell you everything are usually telling you something else.

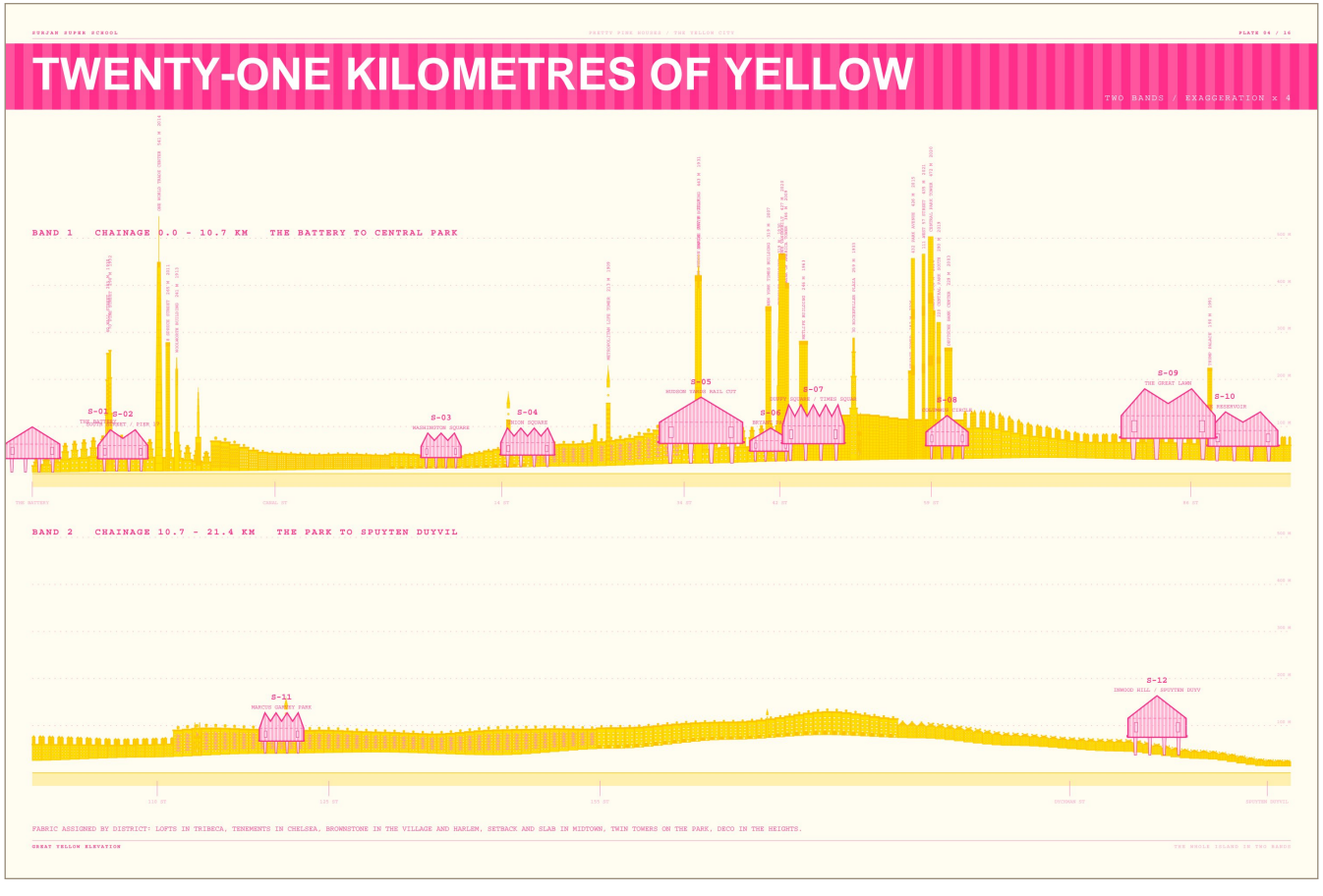
PART FIVE

The Long Pink Morning

Everything that is going to happen has happened. What remains is the part that lasts.

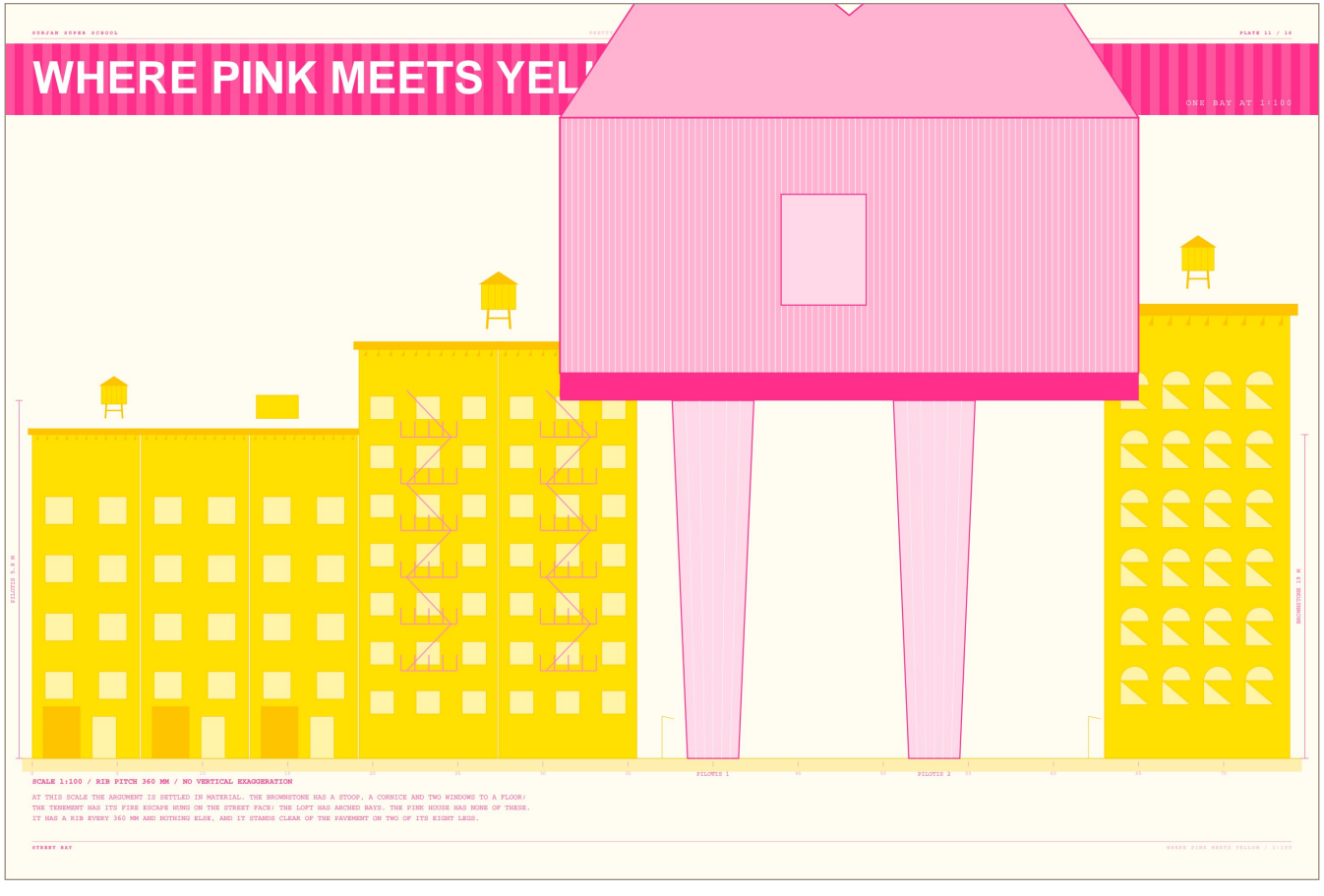
TWELVE HOUSES AT LARGE SIZE, FROM THE WEST, IN THE ELEVENTH MONTH

Twelve houses at large size, from the west, in the eleventh month



THE GREAT YELLOW ELEVATION, IN TWO BANDS

From The Yellow City, Volume Four


SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL
PLATE 11 / 16
WHERE PINK MEETS YEL
ONE BAY AT 1:100
PILOTIS 5.4 M
BROWNSTONE 17 M
PILOTIS 1
PILOTIS 2
SCALE 1:100 / RIB PITCH 360 MM / NO VERTICAL EXAGGERATION
AT THIS SCALE THE ARGUMENT IS SETTLED IN MATERIAL. THE BROWNSTONE HAS A STOOP, A CORNICE AND TWO WINDOWS TO A FLOOR;
THE TENEMENT HAS ITS FIRE ESCAPE HUNG ON THE STREET FACE; THE LOFT HAS ARCHED BAYS. THE PINK HOUSE HAS NONE OF THESE.
IT HAS A RIB EVERY 360 MM AND NOTHING ELSE, AND IT STANDS CLEAR OF THE PAVEMENT ON TWO OF ITS EIGHT LEGS.
STREET BAY
WHERE PINK MEETS YELLOW / 1:100

WHERE PINK MEETS YELLOW: ONE STREET BAY AT 1:100

From The Yellow City, Volume Four

Going Home the Slow Way

BENEDIKT KOWALCZYK, eleven, Inwood

They stayed eleven days and then they went home, and going home took a month, because they went the long way, all of them, deliberately, and not one of them went back by the route it had come.

Green-Eyes went down the west side, along the Hudson, which she had never seen from the land.

Two-Ways went down the middle, straight down Broadway, the whole way, for the first and only time, and every single block of it had people standing on it.

One-Window went four blocks and then turned round and went another twenty and came back, which Perpetua says was showing off and which I think was One-Window making sure that everybody had understood that she had been all the way round the island in April and was not to be underestimated.

Four-Tooth went round the Flatiron the correct way at the first attempt and Ari has still not stopped talking about it.

Pocket went back to the rail cut and stood over the tracks and put his legs down between them and the 4:12 to Poughkeepsie went out under him at 4:12.

Open-Mouth went back to Bryant Park in one afternoon, quickly, like somebody who has left the oven on.

Wavy took nineteen days to go two miles because she stopped at every theatre.

Nettie went one block and then stood at Columbus Circle with her white net full of afternoon and did not move for a week.

Big Sister went back up the Transverse roads and stood on the Great Lawn and Winnie lay down on the grass underneath and stayed there until it got dark and her mother came and got her and did not tell her off.

Twice went back into the Reservoir. It took her three days to get her legs right and the water went white round each one and then settled, and by the fourth morning she was standing exactly where she had been and doubled underneath and looking north.

Curtains went home up Central Park West with her arches open.

And the Slide came all the way up the island to Inwood, ten miles, the last of them, arriving on a Thursday evening in June with the light behind her, and stood at the top of the island facing north-east, over the water, at the Bronx.

And in the dry bank under the overhang there was a fox and four cubs, grown, who had waited.

What Stayed

PERPETUA LIN, eleven, MacDougal Street

I am going to do this as a list because a list is the only honest way to say what a year leaves behind.

THINGS THAT STAYED:

The shade. Which is the biggest one and the one nobody argues about any more.

The walking schedule, which is still published, and which is still accurate to within eleven minutes, and which people now use to plan picnics.

The fact that everybody in this city looks up. This did not exist before. It exists now. It will outlast all of us and none of the visitors will ever know why we do it.

The eleven o'clock thing at Bryant Park, which happens every clear day, and which makes strangers laugh at each other, and which the library has never once tried to organise.

The word for the sound. There is now a word for the sound wind makes in a crown, and it is a word twelve children made up in a notebook, and it is in the newspapers, and I am not going to print it here because it belongs to us and you can come and ask.

Errol's chair, under Green-Eyes, on the warm side.

The gap. Two metres. There is a bench on 59th Street now, put there by nobody official, exactly two metres long, and everybody knows what it is

for and nobody has ever written it down until this sentence.

THINGS THAT DID NOT STAY:

Being frightened. Everybody was frightened for about six weeks and then nobody was, and the six weeks are gone and cannot be got back and I am glad.

The idea that they were for something. This took longer to go and it went in the end.

Our notebooks, most of them. Mine is here. Juno's got wet. Tomás lost his on a bus and has never forgiven himself and has been told a hundred times that his chapters are the best ones.

Being nine, eight, seven, six, ten, eleven and twelve, which we all were, and are not.

THINGS I DID NOT EXPECT AND CANNOT PUT IN EITHER LIST:

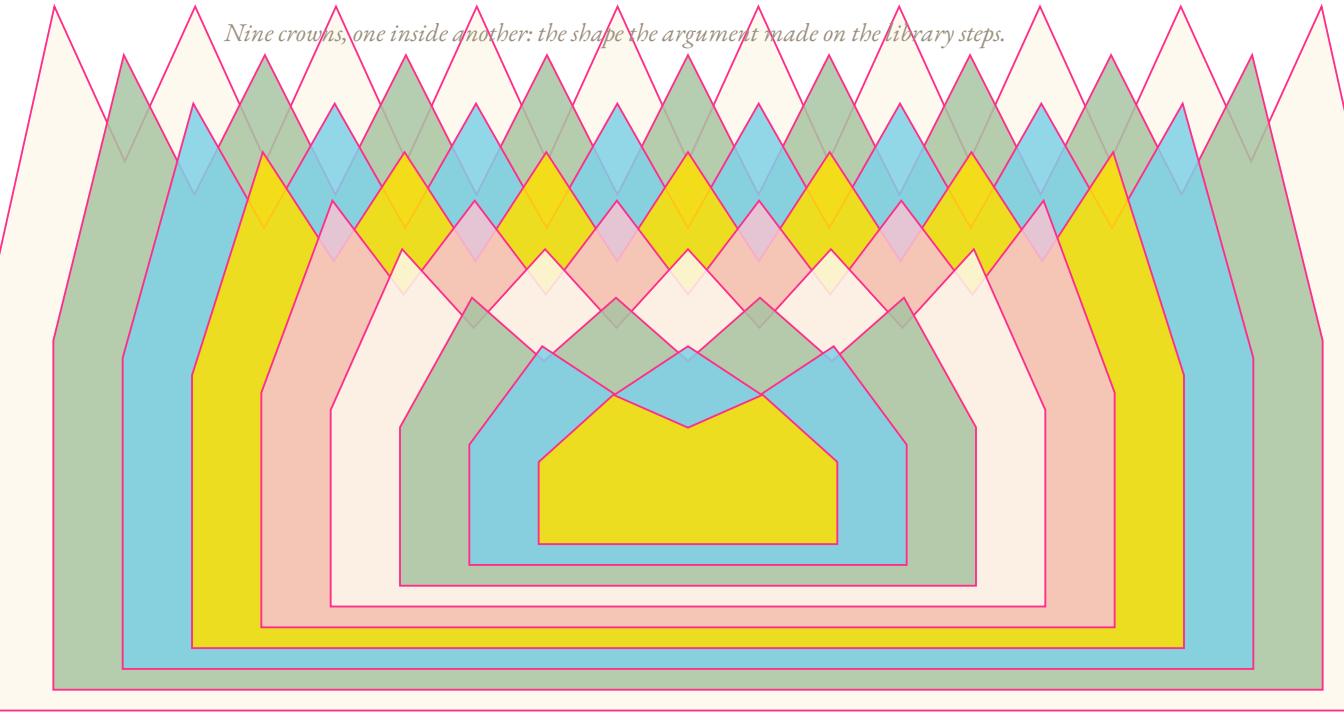
That the whole thing would turn out to be about being able to see each other, and that this would be so simple that grown-ups refused to accept it for two years.

That the fixing of it would be an enormous vulgar impossible act of getting bigger, and that this would be correct.

That none of it would be sad.

A CATALOGUE OF JOYS, RADICAL AND OTHERWISE

Nine crowns, one inside another: the shape the argument made on the library steps.



Joy is the thing you do with the sad bit instead of hiding it. You take it outside. You make it enormous. You paint it a colour nobody can pretend not to see. You put it up on legs so that everybody can walk underneath and nothing is blocked.

A Catalogue of Joys, Radical and Otherwise

Compiled by all twelve, on the library steps, over four Saturdays

---

JOYS THAT ARE ORDINARY:

Bread that is still warm. Getting the window seat. A dog you do not know coming over to you specifically. Being picked. The first cold day when you get to wear the coat. Finding money in a coat from last year. Somebody saving you a seat without being asked. The moment the bath is exactly right.

JOYS THAT ARE RADICAL, WHICH IS TO SAY THAT SOMEBODY HAD TO DECIDE TO DO THEM ON PURPOSE, IN PUBLIC, AT FULL SIZE, WHERE THEY COULD BE SEEN, AND WHERE THEY COULD NOT BE TAKEN BACK:

A house painted pink and put on legs over a harbour.

A woman refusing to move a fruit stall and a building going round it.

A stranger putting a kite back into a room nine hundred metres up while two hundred people watch.

Curtains opening all four arches for a funeral on 120th Street, which nobody asked her to do, and which the family talks about still.

The man on the bicycle who followed Wavy for a year and sold nothing.

Nine hundred schoolchildren lying down in the snow in a stripe of light on a Wednesday, and getting completely soaked, and being allowed to.

One hundred and forty thousand people hitting saucepans at half past one

in the morning while twelve buildings flashed in twenty-seven.

Solomon saying out loud, on the library steps, in front of eleven other children, that he could not name a house after his grandfather because he would spend his whole life watching a house instead of remembering a person. And then going and getting an ice.

Deshawn fetching the man who sells the nuts.

Big Sister putting all eight legs on the road so as not to stand on the snow.

The two metres.

A person who is six years old saying, out loud, in a crowd, that a building has snow in its mouth, and a stranger agreeing with her.

JOY, DEFINED, AFTER FOUR SATURDAYS OF ARGUING, BY TWELVE CHILDREN, UNANIMOUSLY, WHICH HAPPENED ONLY TWICE:

Joy is the thing you do with the sad bit instead of hiding it.

You take it outside. You make it enormous. You paint it a colour nobody can pretend not to see. You put it up on legs so that everybody can walk underneath and nothing is blocked and nothing is knocked down.

And then it is not yours any more, it is everybody's, and it is still yours.

That is all it is. It is not complicated. It is only difficult.

The Children, Later

Compiled by Surjan, from interviews conducted eleven years afterwards

---

INÉS OKONKWO is twenty. She works on the water. She was asked whether she still goes to look at Green-Eyes and she said, with some impatience, that you do not go and look at your own family, you just know where they are.

TOMÁS REYES is eighteen and plays the guitar, badly, and only ever the second-lowest string, which he says is a joke that only two people have ever got.

PERPETUA LIN is twenty-two and is a lawyer, which surprised nobody at all, and which she says she does because somebody has to write the rules down properly and she has been doing it since she was eleven.

ARI GEDALIA is nineteen and is studying mathematics and has published, at his own expense, a nine-page pamphlet about the buses. It is not very good. He knows.

NKECHI ALVAREZ is twenty-one and drives a train under Pocket four times a day, and says that she waves, and that she is aware this is ridiculous.

JUNO PARK is seventeen. She was six and is the only one of the twelve who cannot really remember a time before, and she says this is the great advantage of her life.

DESHAWN FERREIRA is twenty-three and works at a theatre. The man who sold the nuts on the corner of 46th came to his opening night. Deshawn found him a seat.

MIRIAM ASHRAF is twenty and designs buildings, or is learning to, and has said publicly, in a lecture, at twenty, that the entire discipline has one job, which is to work out what is in the way, and that she learned this at nine, on a roof, with a piece of paper.

WINNIE CASTELLANOS is nineteen and lies down in parks. That is the whole of what she said when asked, and she meant it seriously, and she has been in every park in the five boroughs and has a list.

SOLOMON ADEYEMI is twenty-one. He goes to the Reservoir. He has never once described what he does there, to me or to any of the others, and everybody has stopped asking, and there is a bench.

ZAIRA MENDES is eighteen and drums. Obviously. With her aunt's pot, which is now hers, and which is still not used for cooking.

BENEDIKT KOWALCZYK is twenty-two and is a vet, in the Bronx, on the other side of the water, and takes the bridge every morning, and has never in eleven years mentioned the fox to anybody who did not already know.

The Long Pink Morning

INÉS OKONKWO, nine, Battery Park City

I want the last chapter because I had the first one. I was the first to hear one and I was the first to say hello, and I am aware that being first is not the same as being best and I am taking it anyway.

Here is the last thing.

It is early. It is the summer after the Assembly. It is about ten to seven in the morning, which is my hour, and it has been my hour since before any of this started.

I am at the bottom of the island where the water comes round both sides and meets.

Green-Eyes is standing over me on four yellow legs. She is nine hundred metres tall now and I still call her by the name I gave her when she was a hundred, and she still answers to it, because a name is not a description, it is an agreement.

The sun is coming up over Brooklyn.

And here is what happens, and it happens every clear morning, and it will still be happening when everybody who is reading this is dead, and I find that I do not mind that at all.

The light comes up out of the east and it hits the Slide first, because she is furthest north and highest, up at the top of the island on the hill. And she goes pink. Properly pink, hot pink, the colour of the inside of a shell.

And then Curtains catches it, over Harlem, and she opens her arches, which she does not have to do, and never will have to do, and does.

And then Twice, in the water, and then Twice again underneath in the water, so it goes twice at once.

And then Big Sister over the Lawn, both points, one after the other, left then right.

And then Nettie, and the light goes through her white net and comes out in triangles.

And then Wavy, four rounded teeth going pink one after another like somebody running their hand along a fence.

And then Open-Mouth, and the yellow inside her catches, and it will be four hours before she does the eleven o'clock thing but she has started already.

And then Pocket, over the tracks. And then Four-Tooth. And then One-Window, one square of it. And then Two-Ways, pink one way and yellow the other.

And then, last, at ten to seven, at the very bottom of the island, standing over the harbour: her.

It takes about eleven minutes for the light to come down the whole island. Eleven minutes from the top of Inwood to the Battery. I have timed it hundreds of times.

And for those eleven minutes, every clear morning, the whole of Manhattan is a line of pink things going off one after another from north to south, like a fuse, like a xylophone being run down with a stick, like somebody at the top of the island putting the lights on room by room in a very large house because everybody is finally awake.

Nobody does anything about it. There is nothing to do about it.

You just have to be up.

That is the whole thing. That is what all of this was for and it is not for anything. You just have to be up, and out, and short enough to look at something without deciding what it is.

Twelve houses. One island. Eleven minutes of pink, every clear morning,

for ever.

Say hello twice. They will answer the second time.

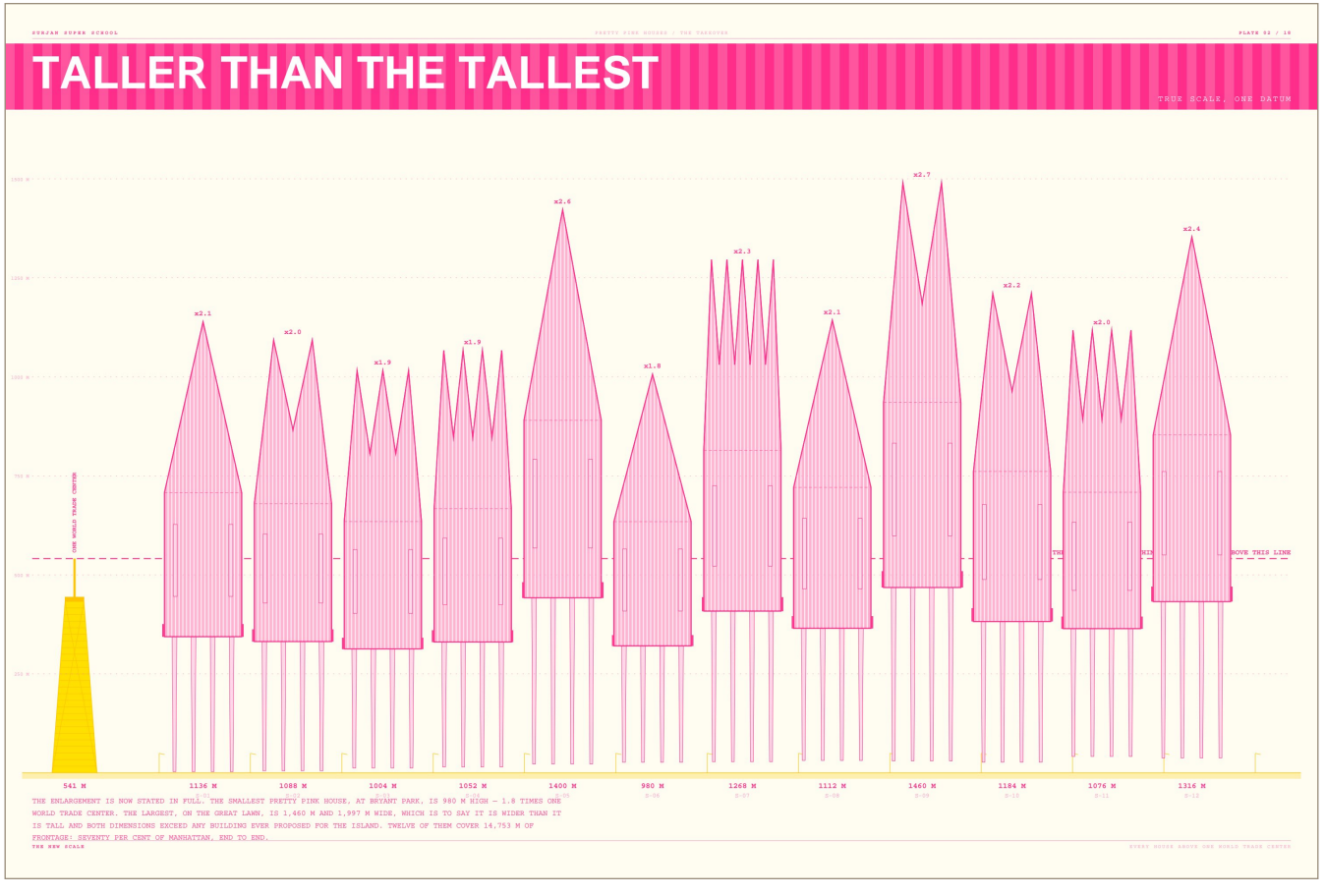
APPENDIX

Plates from the Atlases

The plates that follow are not from the notebooks. They are mine, and they were made over six volumes, before and after the events described in this book, in the attempt to measure what twelve children heard.

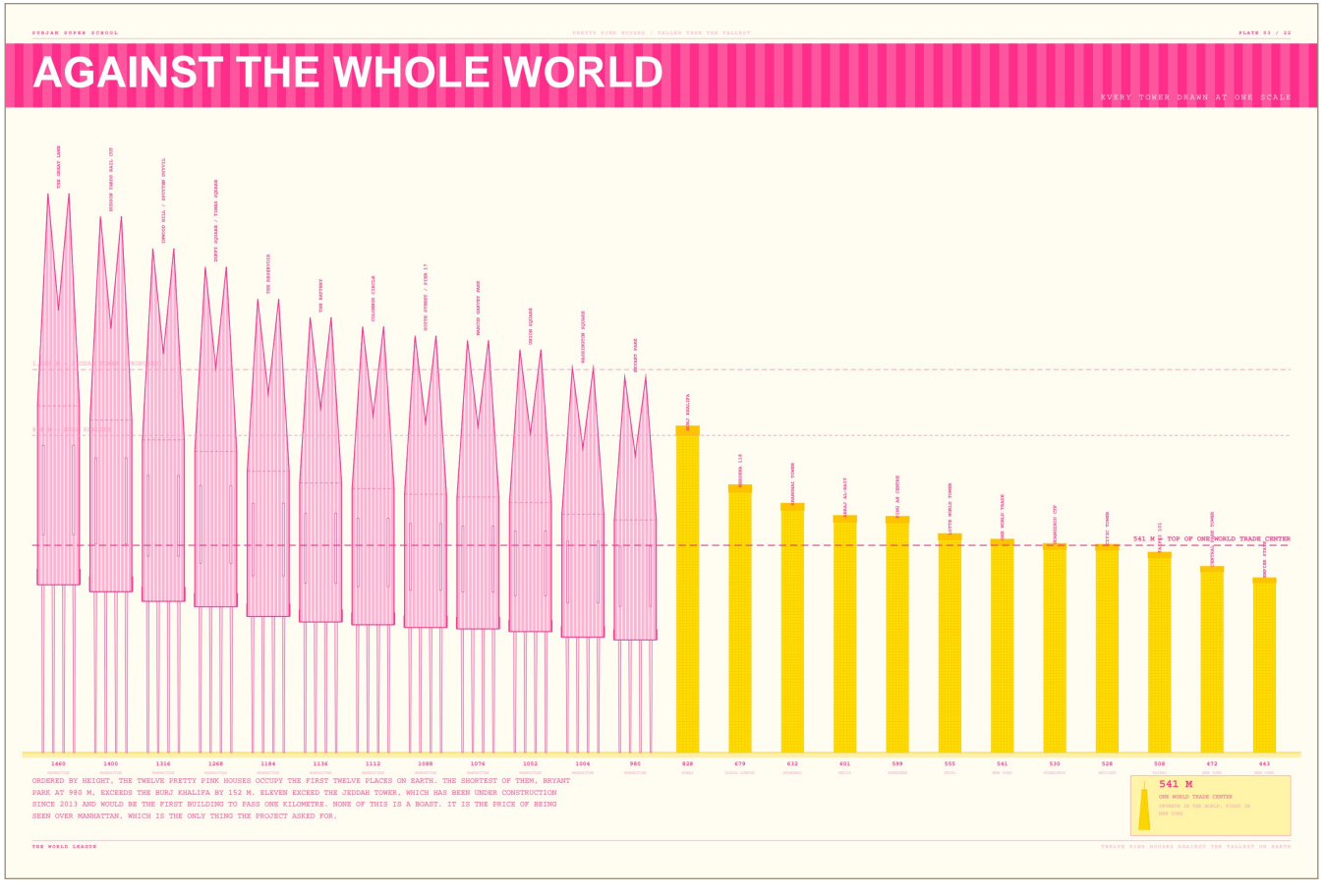
They are reproduced here at reduced size and should be read sideways. Every one of them is drawn to a stated scale, in the house palette, and contains no black.

I have put them at the back because that is where the evidence goes, and because a reader who has got this far has already been told everything that matters by people much shorter than me.


SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL
PRETTY PINK HOUSES / THE TAKEOVER
PLATE 32 / 38
TALLER THAN THE TALLEST
TRUE SCALE, ONE DATUM
x2.1
x2.0
x1.9
x1.9
x2.6
x1.8
x2.3
x2.1
x2.7
x2.2
x2.0
x2.4
ONE WORLD TRADE CENTER
ABOVE THIS LINE
541 M
1136 M
1088 M
1004 M
1052 M
1400 M
980 M
1268 M
1112 M
1460 M
1184 M
1076 M
1316 M
THE ENLARGEMENT IS NOW STATED IN FULL. THE SMALLEST PRETTY PINK HOUSE, AT BRYANT PARK, IS 980 M HIGH — 1.8 TIMES ONE WORLD TRADE CENTER. THE LARGEST, ON THE GREAT LAWN, IS 1,460 M AND 1,997 M WIDE, WHICH IS TO SAY IT IS WIDER THAN IT IS TALL AND BOTH DIMENSIONS EXCEED ANY BUILDING EVER PROPOSED FOR THE ISLAND. TWELVE OF THEM COVER 14,753 M OF FRONTAGE: SEVENTY PER CENT OF MANHATTAN, END TO END.
THE NEW SCALE
EVERY HOUSE ABOVE ONE WORLD TRADE CENTER

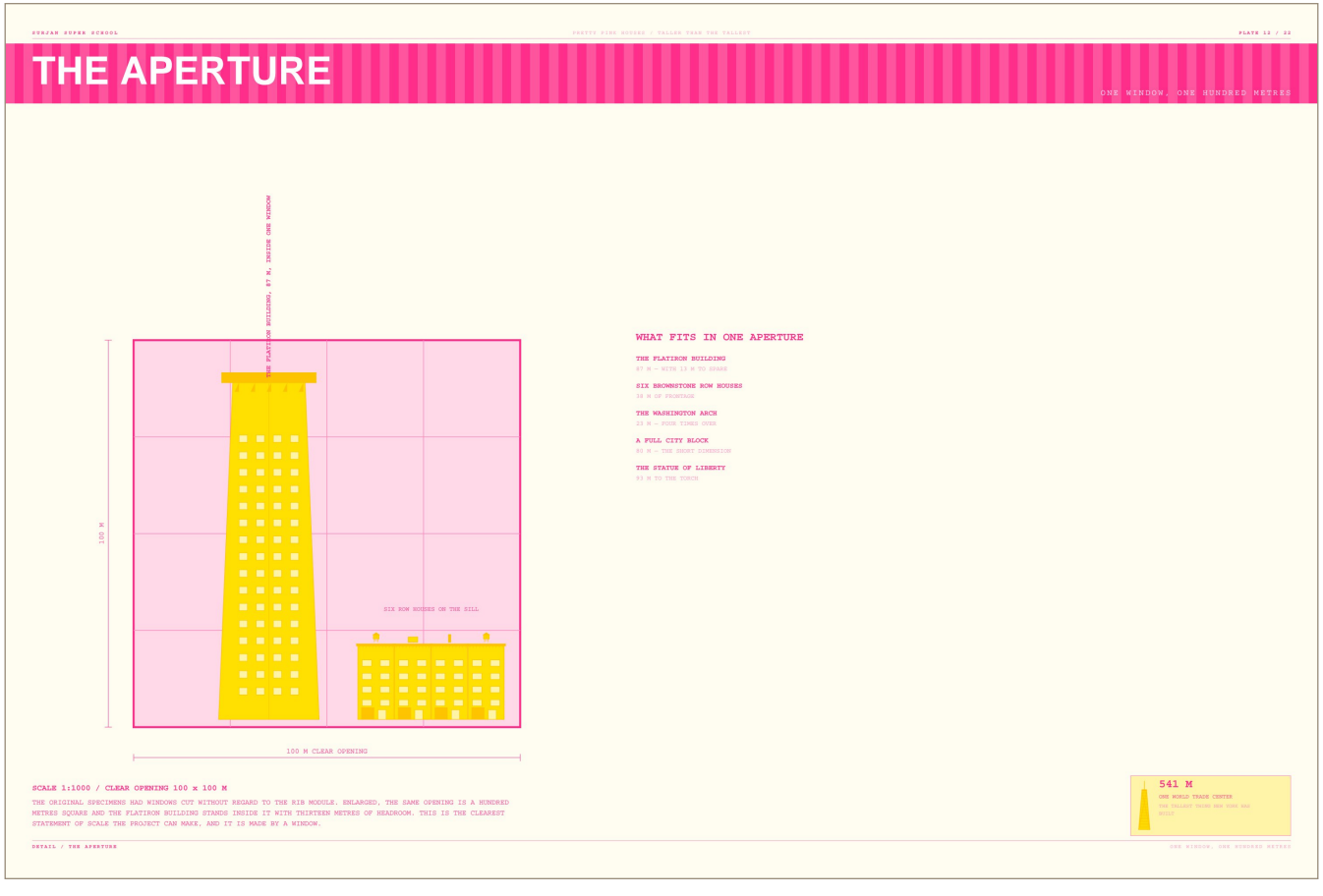
TALLER THAN THE TALLEST: THE TWELVE AGAINST THE 541 METRE DATUM

From The Takeover, Volume Five


SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL
PRETTY PINK HOUSES / TALLER THAN THE TALLEST
PLATE 33 / 22
AGAINST THE WHOLE WORLD
EVERY TOWER DRAWN AT ONE SCALE
THE BRYANT GANG
BUCKINGHAM PALACE
TAJMAHAL MULAYAM / VILA SOCIALE
SHEPPY SQUARE / PIRAMA SQUARE
THE BUCKINGHAM
THE BRITCHEY
COLOSSEUM CIRCUS
ROUGE FERRARI / FIORA 17
MANHATTAN GRAVEYARD PARK
MUSEUM MUSEE
BUCKINGHAM SQUARE
BRYANT PARK
BURJ KHALIFA
MERDEKA 118
ABRAJ AL-BAIT
KING ABDULAZIZ TOWER
SHANGHAI TOWER
PING AN ONEWORLD TRADE
SHENZHEN CITY
541 M TOP OF ONE WORLD TRADE CENTER
1460 1400 1316 1268 1184 1134 1112 1080 1076 1052 1004 980 828 679 632 601 599 555 541 530 528 508 472 443
ORDERED BY HEIGHT, THE TWELVE PRETTY PINK HOUSES OCCUPY THE FIRST TWELVE PLACES ON EARTH. THE SHORTEST OF THEM, BRYANT PARK AT 980 M, EXCEEDS THE BURJ KHALIFA BY 152 M. ELEVEN EXCEED THE JEDDAH TOWER, WHICH HAS BEEN UNDER CONSTRUCTION SINCE 2013 AND WOULD BE THE FIRST BUILDING TO PASS ONE KILOMETRE. NONE OF THIS IS A BOAST. IT IS THE PRICE OF BEING SEEN OVER MANHATTAN, WHICH IS THE ONLY THING THE PROJECT ASKED FOR.
541 M
ONE WORLD TRADE CENTER
SEVENTH IN THE WORLD, FIRST IN NEW YORK.
THE WORLD LEAGUE
TWELVE PINK HOUSES AGAINST THE TALLEST ON EARTH

THE WORLD LEAGUE: THE TWELVE AGAINST THE TALLEST BUILDINGS ON EARTH

From Taller Than The Tallest, Volume Six


SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL
PRETTY PINK HOUSES / TALLER THAN THE TALLEST
PLATE 12 / 22
THE APERTURE
ONE WINDOW, ONE HUNDRED METRES
THE FLATIRON BUILDING, 87 M, INSIDE ONE WINDOW
100 M
SIX ROW HOUSES ON THE SILL
100 M CLEAR OPENING
WHAT FITS IN ONE APERTURE
THE FLATIRON BUILDING
87 M — WITH 13 M TO SPARE
SIX BROWNSTONE ROW HOUSES
38 M OF FRONTAGE
THE WASHINGTON ARCH
23 M — FOUR TIMES OVER
A FULL CITY BLOCK
80 M — THE SHORT DIMENSION
THE STATUE OF LIBERTY
93 M TO THE TORCH
SCALE 1:1000 / CLEAR OPENING 100 x 100 M
THE ORIGINAL SPECIMENS HAD WINDOWS CUT WITHOUT REGARD TO THE RIB MODULE. ENLARGED, THE SAME OPENING IS A HUNDRED METRES SQUARE AND THE FLATIRON BUILDING STANDS INSIDE IT WITH THIRTEEN METRES OF HEADROOM. THIS IS THE CLEAREST STATEMENT OF SCALE THE PROJECT CAN MAKE, AND IT IS MADE BY A WINDOW.
541 M
ONE WORLD TRADE CENTER
DETAIL / THE APERTURE
ONE WINDOW, ONE HUNDRED METRES

THE APERTURE: THE FLATIRON BUILDING INSIDE ONE WINDOW

From Taller Than The Tallest, Volume Six

AFTERWORD

Afterword

I have spent four volumes and one hundred and thirty-one plates measuring these buildings, and a child aged eight measured them in buses and got closer.

That is not modesty. It is a technical observation about instruments. Ari's buses were the correct instrument because they were shared. Twelve children in twelve districts all counted the same buses, so their numbers could be laid beside one another, which is the entire purpose of a unit and is a thing the metric system and I both sometimes forget.

There are three things I want to say and then I will get out of the way.

The first is about the enlargement. I have been asked, more than once, whether making the houses bigger was not simply a capitulation — whether the project did not, in the end, do exactly what every developer on this island does, which is to solve a problem by adding height. I have thought about this for a long time and the answer is in the drawings. A tower adds height and takes ground. The houses added height and gave ground back: every one of them stands on legs, every square metre underneath them is open, and in fourteen months of walking they damaged one bollard. Height taken from the sky is free. Height taken from the street is theft. That is the whole distinction and it is not subtle.

The second is about the gap. Two metres, eleven times, unmeasured and identical. I have drawn it at every scale I know and I cannot improve on Solomon's account of it, which is not architectural and is correct: the sound came from the gaps. Twelve things that had spent a year unable to see one another arranged themselves, at the first opportunity, close but not

touching. They did not merge. Nothing in this book merges. The Assembly is not a building; it is twelve buildings agreeing to stand where the wind can get through.

The third is about joy, and I will be brief, because the children have already said it better on the library steps and I am not going to compete with them.

I began this project after a loss, as most work of any use is begun, and I did the thing one does, which is to make the loss into a discipline and the discipline into a set of drawings, and to keep it, for a long time, at the scale of paper. What I did not expect — what nobody tells you — is that the grief does not want to stay on the paper. It wants to go outside. It wants to be enormous and pink and standing over a harbour on four yellow legs at ten to seven in the morning being obviously, publicly, unignorably happy about the water.

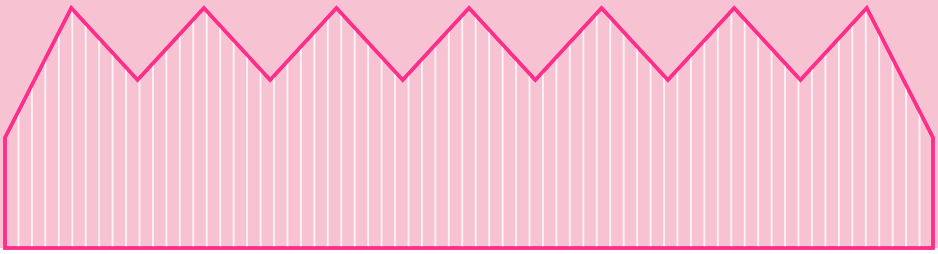
That is radical joy. Not the absence of the sad thing. The sad thing, taken out, made huge, painted a colour, put up on legs so that everybody can walk underneath, and then left there, in public, for ever, where it can be seen by anybody who is up early enough.

Twelve houses did that.

Twelve children wrote it down.

I drew the maps, and the maps are at the back, and they are, I hope, accurate.

SURJAN



Colophon

THE LONG PINK MORNING was collected from twelve notebooks and set in EB Garamond, with notations in IBM Plex Mono. The thirty-three plates are by Surjan; sixteen of them are drawn from the six atlas volumes.

The palette is the house palette: paper F7F1E3, pink F7C3D2, magenta FF2E8B, yellow FFE000, sky 7FD1E8, sage A8C4A2. The darkest tone in the book is a warm taupe, 5C5142. There is no black anywhere in it, by rule.

Companion volumes: A SUPER-SUPERGRAPHIC ATLAS; THE ELEVATIONAL PROJECTIONS; THE CONTEXT ELEVATIONS; THE YELLOW CITY; THE TAKEOVER; TALLER THAN THE TALLEST.

Surjan Super School.
Surjan, with the aid of Claude.

R A D I C A L J O Y